







# PREMIUMS: PAID. TO EXPERIENCE.

Incidents in my Business ~~Life~~

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"Experience is a kind voice in mine ear."—WAKING

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TO

J. R. M.

ONE

“SINGLED OUT FROM ALL THE OTHERS.”



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## PROLOGUE.

HOW often one hears people say, "If I had my time over again, how differently would I act!" But life is like a roll of costly material passing swiftly through our hands, and we must embroider our pattern on it as it goes. We cannot wait to pick up a false stitch, or pause too long before we set another. Only, if we keep our eye ever on our great Exemplar, we shall find that when He finishes off our work, and smooths out its rumples, and cuts away its frayed ends, then even its spots and mistakes fall into a purpose in its plan.

It is very curious for an old man to look back over his past life, and to realise that there is perhaps no being in the whole world more unlike his present self than the boy or the young man he once was. Outward circumstances alone present strange changes. I, Edward Garrett, growing very old and feeble, sitting at my bow-window looking over the fair fields of Mallowe, and surrounded by every comfort

and luxury that a moderate man can desire—am I the same with nimble little Ned Garrett, earning forty pounds a year, owning a back attic in a Stratford “Terrace,” and putting himself on a thrifty allowance of clean shirts and socks? There is a long, long way between then and now. But inner changes are stranger still. I don’t think any Christian man, honestly recalling his youth, need join in the poet’s lament—

“I’m further off from heaven  
Than when I was a boy.”

I think the older a good man grows, the nearer he gets to that immortal childhood which always beholds the face of the Father which is in heaven. I am sure I was harder and more worldly at sixteen than I am at sixty. Nobody can teach us Christianity but the Holy Spirit himself. From unaided human lips, how evangelical soever, it comes simply as the law, and like the typical nation of old, we break its spirit that we may keep its letter.

Well, well, after all, we can only learn by Experience. And verily she is a teacher that crieth without, and uttereth her voice in the streets, though there are many who set at nought all her counsel, and will have none of her reproof. We must all pay the fees of her school, whether or not we will

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learn her lessons, and she charges most to those who learn least. You cannot make an idiot clever by explaining to him all the wonders of nature and art. You cannot make a spendthrift rich, though you give him a mine of Peru. And though you bray a fool in a mortar, you cannot make his folly depart from him. Solomon says "the Lord giveth wisdom," and "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." And if there can be anything like a natural sign of God's elect, I think it is surely the teachable, open mind. Wherever you find a man who can receive a truth that does not fit in with his foregone conclusions, and who can follow a new chain of reasoning without a dead weight of prejudices dragging him back, you may have hope of that man. He may be weak, he may be wicked, but God's Spirit, which is always stirring the atmosphere of life, will find the windows of his heart open, though it may be as late as it was with the thief on the Cross. And this becomes more apparent when we reflect what it is that shuts minds and hearts. It is sin. Not so much sin merely committed, as sin hypocritically hidden or obstinately justified. Many a poor prodigal heartily believes in, and longs for, the virtue that he has lost and despairs to regain, and prefers to keep such faith and appreciation, even at the price of fits



of remorse and despair which are unknown alike to the man who draws the veil of hypocrisy over his secret sins, and then counts all others to be as insincere as himself, or to the bold and blind sinner, who unblushingly dubs his vice a virtue. These last must close up their whole natures, as a man who wishes to keep the contagion of a fever must shut his window, lest the gracious influence of God's air and sunshine should purify unawares. To be sure, His fierce north wind may force an entrance after all, but His fierce north wind does not blow always or often. Let us pray Him to help us to keep our hearts open. It is easier to oil the bolts than to force them when they are rusty.

It strikes me that when it is so interesting to read the adventures of men who have travelled to far countries, it may not be uninteresting to hear of the adventures of one who has travelled the long journey of seventy years. It cannot practically matter to most of us what stores we should lay in, or what route we should take for the Great Sahara, since few of us will go there. But Life is a road some of whose milestones we must all pass. And there are hints which may be given concerning places where the road breaks, and where that which looks most like the thoroughfare proves but a by-path whence we

can only return to the main route through a gate with a heavy toll-fee; and concerning harbours which promise repose and enjoyment, but have a covered pitfall set right in the path thereto. There may be also sundry directions about certain rocky hollows, in whose darkness flow bright streams of living water. Other hints, too, of spots where, by beating away the thorns of the hedge, and waiting awhile, if need be, for the sunshine, one gets glorious views of the Delectable Mountains beyond, and even of a pinnacle or two of the Celestial City.

I can scarcely hope that many of my readers will learn the lessons I wish to teach them till they, too, have paid the price of experience. Each man's life must furnish its own hand-book; but it has some ciphers in it, to which an old man's loving counsel may serve as a key, and "the wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way." It is something to know how and where one has been wrong, even when it is too late to redeem that particular error. We must spoil a few copy-books before we can write our own name legibly. Even if a mistake costs you something which you can never regain in this life, do not imitate the poor lady who made it a special clause in her grief for her daughter's death, that now all her costly music and dancing and painting were quite.

thrown away. "Madam," said a friend, "it must have been a poor education that was not for eternity." If you buy a bit of wisdom at any price, it is a good bargain. Only, if you have no harvest this autumn, don't waste next spring by fretting over it. Many a pathway to heaven hath been deluged and carried away by the flood of regret and despair. The devil chalks up "Too late!" wherever he thinks anybody will stand to read it. But God has only written it once—and that is on the inside of the door of hell.

Some of you will come to sit some day, as I am sitting now, with the last page of life's book turned down, and so little to add, that it does not much matter whether Death adds his "finis" to-day or to-morrow. And I only pray that towards God, and towards the generation that you must leave marching on behind you, your heart may be as the heart of the patriarch Jacob, when the slow root of his life's sorrow burst into double bloom at last, and he blessed the sons of the son he had mourned as lost, saying—

"The God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads."

## L

### A WELL WITHOUT WATER.

MY first home in London was in a prim stuccoed row in Stratford. I was placed there by the old managing clerk of our firm, to whom its head, Mr. Lambert, entrusted the social direction of such youngsters as had no immediate ties in the great city.

There were three of us thus lodged at No. 8, Calvert Terrace. We were recommended there partly because our cashier, an elderly bachelor, rented the first floor, and because our worthy managing-clerk—a kindly spon- sible man, who could not himself have been neutral where it was possible to be active—considered that Mr. Bartram's presence and supervision would be a wholesome check on our youthful indiscretions. But Mr. Bartram's own idea of his duty towards us did not go beyond the faithful administration of a chronic snub. We were never invited into his snug sitting-room, nor asked to accompany him to church, and afterwards to partake.

of his cold Sunday-dinner, that used to look so tempting with its snowy linen and bright glass as it was carried past the oil-clothed stuffy little hall-room, where we were expected to discuss our neck of mutton and tough pickles.

I know that our landlady, Mrs. Summers, made us as comfortable as she could for the small sum we paid her. Had she been able to invest in better appointments and daintier attendance, she must have charged more. I will never join in an unmeaning philippic against landladies. I have known three or four, chosen in no special way, and I record that I found among them more real kindness and hospitality than is possessed by many a polite dinner-giving hostess. People seem to forget that landladies must have a profit, and that they have as much right to remember the ounce of tea they "lent" you, or the twopence they paid on your behalf, as your wine merchant, Mr. Million, has to send you in his fifty-pounds bill. I know that my landladies of later days had a tendency to tell me that "such a gentleman" ought never to use a coloured quilt or a darned sock. But I remember also that the landlady of my youth—good Mrs. Summers—spurned the poor little pence I proffered for a repaired waistcoat, prescribed gratis for my colds, and drew the

sting from these little charities by declaring they were only "tit for tat" for my help in casting up the tradesmen's bills and filling up the census-paper! And thus my experience leads me to feel that in many and many a mean house, not a few toiling, ill-paid women daily offer those kindly cups of cold water which shall by no means lose their reward in some sort.

But yet No. 8, Calvert Terrace, was not altogether a wholesome atmosphere for us. Mrs. Summers herself was like a vigorous sunflower that can grow healthily almost anywhere. But to us, the unavoidable disorder and irregularity were demoralising. The ascetics of the Roman Church seem to regard voluntary dirt and negligence as chief elements in their sanctity; but certainly when they are involuntary, they are the severest discipline of saintship. If your hands are soiled, you are tempted to take up the penny journal or shilling novel, which won't spoil, rather than your morocco Bible or your well-bound volumes of history or biography. If the table is untidy, you can play cards on it better than you can write a letter home, or copy out a Latin exercise. If all arrangements around you are coarsely rough-and-ready, you are likely to forget your polite manners. And after the first disgust wears off, you

are apt to find a dangerous, easy charm in this way of life, and to think it was a mistake to be so fussy and particular as you used to be. And then you begin to wonder whether that mistake of yours does not extend to the morals as well as the manners of life. And then, by-and-by, God help you !

And here, let me say, that worth more than many a costly charity or ponderous Institution, is the gentle Christian hospitality that will keep open something like a home for the lad beginning life in the wilderness of a strange city. Good men and women, do not draw your bar against Sabbath visitors so hard and fast, that you shut out such an one as this. Spare him a corner in your pew and the use of your Sunday bookshelf. Make him brightly welcome, too, now and again of a week night. Let him know the look of your chessboard and the taste of your double Gloucester. Grudge it not, friend. For comfort unshared is like meat unsalted, it will not keep. It was the woman who took in the stranger, whose barrel of meal and cruse of oil wasted not in the time of the famine in Israel. Do not disregard the poor clumsy half-grown lad,—he may prove a fine man by-and-by, if he is not trodden down while he is in chrysalis. Do not make too sure that “he must have somewhere better to go,”—that supposi-

tion has left many a poor fellow to a dull evening or a lovely Christmas. Don't ask him once, and say it is his own fault if he does not choose to come again, — for he has generally a great pride and touchiness, and if you are apt sometimes to think him a little in the way, he is apt always to feel himself very much so. I speak feelingly, knowing the heart of a stranger, since I was a stranger myself.

My two fellow-lodgers were named respectively Frederick Godfrey and David Wills. They were both much older than me, and in receipt of higher salaries. Wills was at least twenty-two, and Godfrey not more than two years younger. David Wills owned the attic alongside of mine. But Frederick Godfrey occupied what was substantially the best bedroom in the house, — the second-floor chamber above Mr. Bartram's drawing-room. He volunteered to walk home with me, after my first day in the counting-house, David Wills having stayed behind to do a little overwork. I was rather flattered to be taken notice of by such a fine young man, for he was quite grown up, had a handsome face, a dashing manner, and a gay gold chain to match.

"I'm glad you're billeted at No. 8," he said, as he went along, "for I'm the same as alone with only Wills. Old Bartram is nearly as good a companion



as he, and that is, none at all. Just fancy, he's staying late, grubbing in that counting-house entirely of his own accord. I call it taking a mean advantage of other fellows."

"How does it interfere with anybody else?" I asked.

"Makes the governors fancy we ought all to be willing to do the same," he replied. "Let them hire more clerks if they want them. I don't believe in keeping bread out of other people's mouths. Live and let live is my motto. But they needn't think that Wills does it out of disinterested industry and devotion to the house. He only wants to get a good bonus at Christmas. He's a regular screw."

"Perhaps he is forced to be," I suggested timidly.

"Nonsense," said young Godfrey. "He gets more than I do. And yet he chooses to live in a pokey cock-loft, knocking his head against the slanting walls."

"It's the same kind of room as mine," I observed, a little nettled.

"My dear fellow, don't you suppose it's the room I object to! Why, I shouldn't mind sleeping in a beer-barrel for a month together to serve a friend. I'd rather like roughing it when there is an object in view. But it's on the same principle that a man

who would not mind a bit crossing a moor in a hail-storm, would not always choose to go about town without an umbrella. But I believe Wills thinks it's a sin to be comfortable. I don't believe he is a pennyworth of profit to poor Mrs. Summers, and she has to cheat the rest of us to make up for it. But I'll protect your interests, and you'll be somebody on my side, too."

I felt myself fortunate in having secured such a frank and gallant champion, and looked up with boyish admiration at his tall, stalwart figure and fine-featured face, all aglow with health and animal energy.

Tea finished, he asked me to go with him for a walk, but I was reluctantly obliged to decline, as I had my boxes to unpack, when he instantly volunteered to help me, and to give me hints on the best way to arrange my drawers, and to fold my garments, so that they should come out with no unseemly creases. I was quite overcome by such condescension. He spent the evening seated on my only chair; and as he manifested great interest in seeing the contents of every little packet, and I was only too glad to turn over possessions with the aroma of my dear home about them, the time passed so quickly and pleasantly, that though we had emptied the

trunk, we had not put one article into the drawers when our supper was announced. For, at Godfrey's suggestion, we were going to have supper, though it was not the rule of the house, and would be charged as an extra. We left the things strewn over bed and toilet-table, and went down-stairs, where David Wills was sitting on a corner of the sofa, reading.

He looked up, and made some kindly observation to me, which I hope I answered with civility; but I was at that age when prepossessions are quickly formed, and there is a proneness to adopt all the prejudices of our idols, even with exaggeration. He was of a slighter build than Frederick Godfrey, and had irregular features, rather pale and thin. He was not to join in our repast; and after a few quiet answers to some bantering talk of Godfrey's concerning his assiduity in the counting-house, he bade us both good night, and took his book to his own room up-stairs.

"I'm glad he's gone," said my new friend, forking up his broiled kidney. "But that's his way of showing that he doesn't think one good enough for him."

"Perhaps he thought it seemed rude to sit aside whilst we were eating," I suggested.

Godfrey laughed heartily. "You'll soon learn

not to expect that people here are governed by those good old rules of old-fashioned etiquette," he said. "Mind, they are the right thing in the right place, but that isn't here. And don't ever try to find excuses for nasty people. It's an aggravating habit. And it makes others think you are on their side in a sneaking way. I always set them down as all of a piece, though I'm the very first to forgive anything in a downright good fellow who means well in the main."

After supper he said carelessly that he should go out and smoke a cigar round the squares, and as perhaps I would be in bed before he returned, he would bid me good night at once. I could not venture to remind him of his promised aid, which of course he had forgotten. I remember that Mrs. Summers, shrewdly guessing that my bed-room routine would not take more than a quarter of an hour, allowed me that measure of candle, and my light dropped out just as I was counting over my socks, and I had to huddle in the rest of my things in the dark, the result being that next morning I found my best waistcoat crumpled up at the bottom of my bed, and a great clot of tallow on my only pair of kid gloves.

But I was fascinated with Frederick Godfrey, and

when we were all three gathered in the counting-house next day, I coolly put aside David Wills's quiet offer to explain anything I did not understand by saying that Mr. Godfrey had promised to see me through everything. To be sure, when I applied to Godfrey, he was generally not to be found, or too busy to attend to me; but he had always a liberal promise for next time, and I had to solve my difficulties by myself, or even, in one or two instances, to apply to Wills, who always responded with a grave good-nature, which, to my foolishness, seemed too business-like to require much gratitude.

How easily some people would pay their way if cheques could be dishonoured with as much impunity as promises are broken!

Wills and I sat to breakfast alone on Sunday. Godfrey had not come down. I remember, as I looked at Wills cutting off our thick slices of bread-and-butter (he cut for both of us), I could not help wishing that Godfrey liked him better, for then I thought I should. I felt that, without Godfrey's warning, I should have been so sadly mistaken as to think him a very kind and winning person. He talked about the preacher whose ministry I had been advised to attend, spoke warmly of the good man to hear whom he walked all across London, and offered to lend me

some books written by him, and, in fact, we got on so pleasantly, that I almost blushed when Godfrey sauntered in, just as it was time for Wills to start chapel-wards.

"That's the last we shall see of him till night," said my friend, as Wills departed. "Sometimes, I suppose, he lives off friends; others, I dare say, he starves. I never knew him to have anything but bread-and-butter and tea for breakfast since we have lived here. And he dines at a smutty little ordinary of one shilling a head. And yet he is getting a great deal more money than I am."

I had dutifully obeyed Godfrey's suggestion that I should "never make excuses for nasty people;" but Wills had given me so pleasing an impression that morning, that I could not help saying—

"Perhaps he has to help a father or mother."

"That he hasn't," Godfrey retorted. "Somehow I got to know that his mother, who lives in the country, has fifty pounds a year of her own. No, Garrett, he's just one of those fellows who find such a pleasure in hoarding that they need no other, and look down on anybody else who does."

"He never says a word against you," I ventured to say.

"Has he any reason?" Godfrey asked, with a

fierceness that half frightened me. "Besides, he's a coward. He can pull a long face and keep an insulting silence, because he knows I can't punch his head for that. And he'd like to curry favour with everybody, for enemies are dangerous, and friends may be profitable. Give me a man who says what he thinks, fearlessly. I may quarrel with such, but I can shake hands afterwards."

I did not notice the broken logic of his first sentences, but I admired the sentiment of the last.

Godfrey told me he would come to church with me, only he had a very particular reason to go somewhere else. So he returned to his room, but presently called me down from mine, to ask me to lend him a handkerchief. He had neglected putting his up for wash till he had only two or three very common ones left. I ran to my drawer and fetched one, and he received it with many thanks and assurances that everything of his was at my disposal—life went so much more easily when two people worked together in a brotherly way.

So Frederick Godfrey and I became constant companions. David Wills asked me if I wouldn't like to hear a series of very able historical lectures about to be delivered at an institute to which he belonged. As a member, he could get me a ticket free. The

offer tempted me, but I had a foolish idea of honour that would not let me accept without consulting Godfrey, who promptly pooh-poohed the thing. The institute was a set of old fogies, he said. David Wills would think he had conferred a boundless favour upon me, and would want twenty times its value in return. Besides, if he might take the liberty of saying so, I would do better to devote myself to a lighter kind of learning than the institute patronised. He himself wanted to read up in fiction and poetry during the ensuing winter, and we could do it together. And he believed Wills was taking upon himself to think that he ought to look after me as an inexperienced greenhorn among the dangers of a great city. It was just like his impudence!

Consequently, Wills's invitation was refused, with very cool thanks.

Godfrey and I had many a ramble together in the grey evenings of that autumn. I began to learn something of his history. He had a widowed mother and two elder sisters, who kept a small boarding-school in a quiet country town. They had to work very hard, he said. He wished he could make a lot of money, and then he would help them. Perhaps he should get into business for himself some day,



and then he should send for them to London, and they should keep his house. We were wandering about Finsbury while he talked of them, and he spoke touchingly of the bitterness he felt in seeing other men's mothers in their new silks and satins, while he always found his in her old black bombazine and grey shawl. Presently we emerged upon the Pavement, and happening to see some fine lobsters exposed for sale, he paid eighteen pence for one and took it home for his supper.

Another night he told me that he was engaged. My simple heart quite beat with the sense of coming years and responsibilities, to find myself on friendly terms with a man who dared to be engaged. Frederick Godfrey spoke of the subject in a strain of sorrowful sentiment which stirred my youthful sensibilities. The lady of his love was Ellen Wyman, the only daughter of a merchant, whose house was in Bloomsbury, where he occasionally visited. She was just a year younger than himself, and a sweet, pretty girl, he said. Her parents knew nothing about it, because the misguided pair knew that they would not approve. Frederick fancied the mother suspected something, because she was cooling towards him. He said moodily that Ellen would have plenty of money. They would say that was what he wanted. He

wished she had not a penny. They would say he ought to have been too honourable to engage her affections; but, at any rate, he had begged her over and over again to think no more of him, but to let him drop from her bright path, as the cloud drops from the sun, and to move on in beauty and happiness, as if no such Being of Agony and Despair had ever existed. His heart must take her image down to the silent grave; but no matter, he besought her to hold herself free and unprejudiced whenever young Tilson, the stockbroker—who her mother was always lauding to the skies—should make that offer for which (this in parenthesis) Godfrey believed Mrs. Wyman was always scheming. Only the more he thus exhorted her, the more the darling little simpleton clung to him, vowing that she could not give up such a noble and disinterested lover for all the fathers, mothers, and Mr. Tilsons in the world! But he never hoped to marry her. It was the fiat of the Fates that they should walk apart, blighted.

Some evenings he spoke in a different strain. Poorer men than he had been jilted by richer girls than Ellen Wyman, and had lived to make them repent it. A man's life was not ended, like a woman's, when the love fell out of it. He was not sure, after all, whether he might not prefer a roving life abroad

—say in the Bush, with a few jolly companions and plenty of sport and adventure—to existence in London on two or three hundred a year, spending one's evenings with one's wife and babies. He would laugh boisterously when he was in this mood. I set it down as the bitterness of a breaking heart; for the course of poetry and fiction, on which we had already entered, was teaching me that saturnine sophistry which, though it doubts feeling where emotion is patiently restrained, credits it most largely where there is a forced and brutal display of its absence. I had not then learned that if the sincerest mourner does not always weep the most at a funeral, neither does he masquerade there in a clown's motley.

In the course of those wanderings, we had other conversations not wholly personal. We had both been brought up in serious homes. There were mutual childish reminiscences of religious habit and training. If it had not been so, even I should have been more mistrustful when my companion began to discuss views which had never before been brought specifically before my young mind, but which I had been taught to regard generally as infidel and destructive. He put them forth at first in a very tentative way, as what other people said, and he wondered

whether there was any truth in them. They were religious doubts and mystifications of all sorts, physical and metaphysical, from the geology of Genesis to the theology of the Epistle to the Romans. I don't remember more of them now, than that they were of the flimsiest material worn threadbare, and that anybody honestly seeking their solution need not have appealed to the higher and more abstruse canons of biblical criticism, but would have found them satisfactorily answered by most of the humbler text-books on the subject. But at the time they gave me a painful sense of confusion and uncertainty—a sort of restless craving that sent me back again and again to the same subject, as a man returns to a stimulant that at first nauseated him.

Frederick Godfrey led me on and on. He could read my uneasiness, but overruled it. It was a man's duty to inquire, he said. It was a poor faith that dared not ask a question. I might have retorted that it was a querulous doubt which would not wait for a reply, but then I did not notice that peculiarity in his style of argument.

I have often thought of those days when I have heard people say that it cannot matter much what a man believes, so long as he lives up to right moral principles. They might as well remark that it does

not matter if the beams of a house are rotten, so long as the door-plate is bright. Where will be the door-plate, when the house falls? A hazy creed means a mazy life. A man's faith is the mainspring of his actions. He who believes nothing will do nothing, till the devil finds him work. I record as my own experience that when the foundations of faith rocked, the superstructure of practice reeled.

I wonder to what I might not have been tempted in those days but for the vivid memory of my quiet country home, and my brave patient sister who trusted me so much. What I felt almost daring enough to risk for my own sake I somehow could not risk for hers. Even with this restraint I fell far enough to make me shudder at every reminiscence of that dangerous way. A man who has narrowly escaped death over a precipice will scarcely care to try again how close he can venture to the edge.

But God kept a good influence, yet nearer to me in those dangerous days. When I, too, began to come down late to breakfast on Sundays, I quailed before David Wills's quiet glance. My tea was poured out and my bread buttered in readiness. He never made more than a cheerful remark that if I didn't make haste I should be late for service, as

if he would not in the least suppose that I did not care, whether I was early or late. It made me ashamed to say so. It made me mumble some excuse and make haste. I thought to myself what a sly poltroon he was not to speak out plainer, and did not notice that the utmost object of plainest speech was evidently attained without it!

But I soon found he could speak out boldly enough, and that too in the presence of my doughty friend. He might not wish to alienate Godfrey still further, and he might conclude that any actual personal interference with me would defeat itself. But a book was a fair field for discussion.

It was the work of a man who has gone to his account long since, but his name was in everybody's mouth in those days. For there was a sparkle on the top of the poisoned cup which he held out, and there was an intoxication in it which made those who partook ready to believe that it was wholesome to the dregs. Under the pretence of unconventionality, this poet would attribute to robbers and demi-reps those highest virtues whose possible existence in reputable people he treated with scornful incredulity and denial. He had a wonderful eye for the beauties of nature, but he had the devil's own opinion of human nature. His life was a contagion;

and he has left to the world a memory like the trail of a serpent.

Frederick Godfrey had lent me one of this man's worst books. It was not his own, but borrowed from an acquaintance. This was his utmost fulfilment of his grand proffer of all that was his. True, I never asked him for any loan but once, and that was for a pair of sleeve-links, mine inopportunately breaking while we were dressing to go to tea with our head clerk. But he had put off dressing till the last minute, was flustered by a pair of tight boots, had but a very common set to spare, and they were at the very bottom of his trunk; if it had been any-think else, my dear fellow, &c., &c.

I was sitting in our common room, reading this book while I waited for Frederick Godfrey. A play by the same writer was then being acted at one of the theatres, and Godfrey had gone somewhere to see if he could procure tickets, having at last overcome my scruples, and persuaded me to accompany him. And I felt very uncomfortable, for my conscience was ill at ease.

Wills came in. He knew what I was reading, for the volume had been lying about at breakfast-time. He poured out a cup of tea for himself, and then said—

"That book doesn't belong to you, does it?"

"No," I replied, "it belongs to some friend of Godfrey's."

"I am sorry to see you reading it, Garrett," he observed gravely.

At another time I should have remembered my crony's instructions, and in his words "given the sneak no chance to show off" by keeping silence. But I was off my guard. I was so terribly self-accused, that I was eagerly defensive, as kings will try to avert civil strife by foreign war.

"I want to see what it is like for myself," I said, using an argument of Godfrey's concerning the theatre which was still uppermost in my mind. "It is uncharitable and thoughtless to condemn on hearsay." For I must remark that warning voices had already gone forth respecting this author.

"Will you not believe that arsenic and prussic acid are poison without tasting them?" he asked.

"Then are we to take for granted all that is told us?" I retorted. "How can we tell when criticism is sincere and disinterested? Are we to have no judgment of our own unless we are parsons?" I almost blushed to feel with what effrontery I was quoting arguments which I had been faintly combating only an hour or two earlier. I never felt so



helplessly young and puerile, as in this my defiant claim to self-dependent manhood.

David Wills looked at me with sorrowful eyes, and paused before his reply.

"Without being chemists, we may all test poison, and try experiments with dangerous gases," he said, "provided we have a certain amount of knowledge to begin with, and a suitable apparatus. Under similar conditions we may all be fit to handle error."

"What conditions?" I asked.

"They cannot be named as easily as a crucible or a battery," he said, smiling, "yet they are definite enough. Given a sufficient knowledge of one's self, a thorough acquaintance with the Bible, a constant prayer for God's help and guidance, and, last of all, a habit of self-restrained earnest life—and the man becomes in things spiritual like an expert in things material. He does not need to constantly apply weight and measure, but swiftly detects the fraudulent and rejects the adulterated."

"And unless we can come up to this wonderful standard are we to keep our judgments in slavish submission?" I asked. Poor little me, I had heard a good deal of talk in heroics lately, and there is no measure so easy to catch!

"No," he said, with that little dimple at the corner of his mouth which made him look so aggravatingly pleasant, "we must always be growing towards it. And there is one simple rule which will help us wonderfully while we are so doing: Never to be fascinated by the originalities of a writer whose life is immoral."

At that moment Frederick Godfrey burst in hastily. He looked worn and haggard; indeed, for some time he had not seemed well or cheerful, but whereas he had formerly rushed to the chemist's for some decoction for every headache or indisposition, latterly he had repudiated my suggestion of a doctor's aid, saying that doctors could do him no good.

"Are you ready, Ned? What, not done your tea! I've got two pit tickets. My chum could only get me gallery ones, but I paid the difference."

"I thought you never went to the theatre, Garrett," said David Wills.

"I've never been before," I answered, terribly uneasy—"I am just going for once."

"I can treat you to a gallery ticket if you'd like one, Wills," said Godfrey pertly. "I've got another in my pocket, and I shall only throw it into the gutter."

Wills just glanced at him, but did not answer. Somehow I felt ashamed of my friend. Why was he so coarsely insolent? There seemed a difference in his face too, like that which a new light will give a picture. He looked vulgar and sensual. Perhaps when a scale is taken from a man's eye he thinks a mist has melted from the world.

"If you go, Garrett," said Wills very quietly, "you must tell them at home, or it will be acting a lie. Don't go."

I looked at Godfrey. I had raised this difficulty myself, but he had silenced it by saying that nobody expected a fellow to tell friends everything, but that I could tell them if I liked, for they could not help themselves, only it would be kinder to spare their feelings. An old woman and a girl buried in the country, could not be judges of what was fit and proper for a young man in London, and then he had hummed an impromptu stanza :

"Pretty baby, when it fell"  
Did its sissy make it well;  
Pretty baby, did it cry,  
Let its mammy wipe its eye."

Against which magnificent sarcasm I could not contend.

"Come along if you're coming," was now

Godfrey's only response to my appealing glance, speaking in an injured tone. "If you had not made up your mind to come, you should not have let me go hunting all over the town, making a fool of myself, to get tickets."

It was a voice which I had grown accustomed to obey, though it had not spoken before in that tone. I went off to my room to make some trifling alteration in my dress. As I left the parlour, Godfrey threw himself on the sofa, and made some remark, between a taunt and a jeer, to David. I did not hear the words of his reply, but I heard its tone—calm and decided. On my return from my chamber, I met him on the stairs. He put his hand on my shoulder, and said, "There's time to change your mind yet."

"I can't disappoint Godfrey," I answered, half-shaking off his touch. "It can't do me any harm for once."

He looked at me, and there was a quiet humility in his sorrowful eyes, as they softly met mine.

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

That was all he said—those words and no more. I must go to my stolen pleasure with them ringing in my ears.

Godfrey sprang from his couch and joined me. He had recovered from his annoyance, and was now in boisterous spirits. But I could not join in the ridicule he heaped on David Wills; and when he made such remarks as that Mrs. Summers "had taken the very looking-glass out of the miser's room, which showed he must be either paying her so little that he daren't interfere, whatever she did, or else that he permitted her to do it in consideration of the deduction of another sixpence a week from his rent,"—it gave me a positive jar, just as if a low street song had broken in on the sweet melody of a psalm.

That is the only time I ever entered a play-house. I have a confused remembrance of brilliant scenery and extravagantly luxuriant dresses, and a drama with impossible incidents, where the scapegrace hero was washed into an angel in disguise, by being wrecked on a desert coast with a coffer of gold, which comfortably provided for him ever afterwards, when he married the girl who had been engaged without any love to his stupid brother, who was contented to plod in the bank of their old uncle. I remember that all the elderly people of the piece were great criminals or perfect idiots, and it was treated as the natural duty of their juniors to thwart

and out-general them, and to empty their purses. I have a more distinct recollection of a wretched heat in the eyes and dryness of the lips. Then Godfrey grew sulky and pettish again in the course of the evening, and began to stand upon his rights with people about us, and quarrelled with a man in front, who had brought a cushion to sit upon, which raised him to an abnormal height, and positively obscured about half an inch of our view. And the man answered back, and offered an appeal to the pit-attendant, and his wife and two other female companions muttered and scowled at me. And when it was over, it was too late to expect to find bread-and-cheese waiting us at Calvert Terrace; and Frederick Godfrey remarking that he had left his purse at home, there was nothing for it but for me to take out mine, and politely understand that, in consideration of the value of my ticket, I must spend three times its price on refreshments. This was especially inconvenient, as it forced me to break half-a-sovereign which I had set aside to purchase a birthday present for my mother.

•I had a bad night. I dreamed that I myself was wrecked on a desert coast, but, instead of the coffer of gold, there was only a black monkey, who grinned and made game of me. And when I woke in the

morning it came to me, with a bitter sting, that this was the day when I usually began my weekly letter home. I generally dallied with it for two evenings, because it was pleasant company. But now I said to myself that at any rate I need not begin it till to-morrow.

I was late for breakfast, and did not want any, and the weak dregs of the tea-pot nearly made me sick. David Wills had already started for the counting-house. I was glad of that, for I did not want to confront him. Godfrey was in high but fitful spirits. He said he had just received a remittance from a paternal uncle, but the worst of it was it must nearly all go to wipe out old scores. How could a fellow live on eighty pounds a-year? He laughed, rather cruelly I thought, at my pale face and sickly appetite, saying it was only because I was not used to it. When I had gone five or six times it would become quite a matter of course.

But that was my first and last visit to the theatre. I am not going to discuss this matter. This is not a record of opinions, but a diary of experience. I speak that I do know, and testify that I have seen. And what I know is, that all the pleasure I derived was of a mocking, feverish character, only to be called pleasure by me, as some unsophisticated

diners-out will call Indian condiments savoury whilst they are choking and blinding them; that the companion who had invited me there had never seemed so neglectful and ungenial as when I had accepted his offer; and that the revelations of closely following events wrote across that boyish temptation such stern and solemn warnings that beneath them it became utterly illegible.

I can never forget the morning, only two days after this, when a rumour was whispered through the counting-house that something was wrong. My letter to my mother, for the first time delayed, still lay unfinished in my desk, and I felt so utterly anchorless and miserable that I was almost glad even of a sinister excitement from without.

It was a sweet April day. The dusky place was full of fresh spring sunlight. It glittered on the silvery head of the firm's old solicitor, as he passed through to the master's private room, where presently the clerks were summoned one by one; and as each examination closed, instead of being allowed to return to the counting-house, they were remitted to an ante-chamber, beyond the principal's sanctum. At last there remained only Godfrey and me. His seniority made it natural that he should be summoned first, but the cashier called my name instead,



and Godfrey's face looked pale in the sunshine as I went out.

I found Mr. Lambert, another partner, the solicitor, and the head-clerk seated in conclave. They were kindly, elderly men, and all known to me. But the strange majesty of the law was about them now, and innocent as I knew myself to be—I trembled. Their library-table had become judicial, and the chair on which I sat was but a private dock.

Mr. Lambert spoke encouragingly. "They were about to ask me a few questions," he said. "I must well consider my answers, but need not be afraid, so long as I spoke the whole truth."

He believed I lodged in the same house with Mr. Godfrey. Did I know whether Mr. Godfrey paid his rent regularly, or had lately been in debt of any sort?

I hesitated. I knew nothing about the rent, for Godfrey always merged all particulars in the general term of "difficulties." At most I could only testify to their recent existence; but it pained me even to do this, for he was my friend; and though I had begun to suspect that he might go too far in some ways, I was indignant that he should be thus suspected.

I think the head-clerk would have spoken sharply, but Mr. Lambert checked him.

"You have lived on friendly terms," he said gently, "and this seems to you a betrayal of confidence. It is really not so. Innocence has nothing to fear, and is best proved by the truth."

I admitted almost inaudibly that Godfrey had been in difficulty, nervously adding, as I thought in his favour, that I believed he had felt very distressed about it.

"Doubtless he *was* very distressed," said the solicitor drily. "And now, young gentleman, can you tell us the history of the evening of the 18th instant—not yesterday, the day before?"

It was harder to answer him than Mr. Lambert. There was a peculiar emphasis in his way of calling me "young gentleman." My old master was looking at me anxiously, and I felt my face colour to the roots of my hair.

"We went to the theatre together," I stammered. And Mr. Lambert leaned suddenly back on his chair.

"Did he pay for you?" asked the solicitor, who was making notes.

"He had gallery tickets given to him," I answered; "but he paid the difference, and we went to the pit."

"Do you know who gave him the tickets?" inquired somebody.

I knew the person's name, and where he lodged or did business. Godfrey had spoken of him as a friend of his. I had never seen him.

"That's a low money-lender and theatrical agent," said the solicitor, as he jotted down the address I gave. "Do you know when he got the tickets?"

"That same evening, after office-hours," I replied.

"Who left the office first that evening, you or he?"

I did. I had been the very first clerk to leave. I had gone straight home, and Mr. Wills had followed presently, and Godfrey had come in about three-quarters of an hour later.

"Did we speak to anybody at the play?"

"No," I answered, in perfect good faith, but recollected myself. "Yes, we did—at least, Godfrey did; but it was only to a stranger, casually."

I must tell all about it.

With a burning sense of ignominy I did so, relating the episode of the man with the cushion, and how words had run so high between him and Godfrey, that they had stepped aside with a view to exchanging cards. I had not watched them during

that interview, being forced to own that I had been so ashamed of Godfrey, that I had tried as well as I could not to appear connected with him.

“What was the man like?”

“Tall, and dark, and sallow. An ugly man, with some fault in his left eye.”

And I had never seen him before or since?

“Never before. But, oddly enough, I had happened to see him again next day, yesterday, in Broad Street. I did not think he noticed me. He had a short, fair man with him.”

“Eh, indeed! Did I recollect anything else about the appearance or dress of this short, fair man?”

“He had reddish hair, and a soft, grey hat. I did not notice more particularly.”

The junior partner gave a long, low whistle, and the others looked at each other significantly.

“Do you know if Mr. Godfrey has in any way got out of his difficulties?” the head-clerk asked.

“No, I only knew he would do so, as he had a remittance from his uncle yesterday morning, with which he was going to pay his debts.” I spoke with the ardour of a special pleader.

“Dear, dear, dear!” sighed good old Mr. Lambert, “how can you account for a man’s making

such an admission as that, under such circumstances ? ”

“The natural imbecility of crime,” said the solicitor coolly.

And I was dismissed.

In less than half an hour Frederick Godfrey was in custody, on a charge of stealing notes of the value of £100 from his masters. He had found an opportunity of putting his hands upon them on the evening when he remained late at the office, and had hoped to pass them quickly off to the man who gave him the tickets. But so direct a clue was too dangerous for that worthy. He would have nothing to do with the affair. And he got off scot-free, though there was no moral doubt that he arranged the meeting with the other confederate in the theatre, where the notes were transferred, to be cashed next morning by the “fair man” the moment the bank doors were opened, and before they were missed. It was elicited that my wretched companion had received but thirty pounds as his share of the transaction.

I shall never forget that miserable time. Mr. Lambert’s words of warning were trustful and kind. But the head-clerk spoke sharply, and the juniors stood aloof. Those who were nearest my danger were the severest on me, whilst he who was safest

from my mistakes, though he had suffered under them, was gentlest, and kindest, and most appreciative of my temptation. I was almost ashamed of the thankfulness with which I now accepted David Wills's long-sighted companionship.

What true, tender, sympathetic words he spoke! He would not let me be afraid to tell the whole story to my mother and sister. He even helped me to tell it. I was willing enough to go to chapel with him now, and to read his books. I could even confide to him the straits I was in for the money and comforts I had lent to Godfrey. And much as I afterwards found he just then needed all his own, he found something to spare for me.

Godfrey was tried at last. But before his trial he made an attempt at suicide, and was brought up for that as well. It was a singularly abortive and insincere attempt, though he had arranged all preliminaries most methodically,—down to a high-flown letter to “dear Miss Ellen,”—full of “for her dear sake,” and “is it in heaven a crime to love too well?”—with the poor girl's surname, and her father's address subscribed in full. It was suggested in our counting-house that this letter was the ruling motive of the attempted suicide, in the hope that, for his daughter's sake, old Mr. Wyman might repay the

stolen money, and induce the prosecution to stay its hand. If so, it was doubly defeated. The letter was very properly suppressed without publication in the newspapers, but it so enraged the young lady's father that when he heard Messrs. Lambert & Co. were inclined to be merciful out of pity for Godfrey's poor mother and sisters, he came to them and urged justice to its utmost limit. How the unhappy Ellen felt was not to be discovered. Her parents professed to forgive her duplicity, but her household happiness may be imagined. About three years later I saw the announcement of her death. She died in an hotel at Ventnor. That told its own story.

So the trial went on, and the sentence proved unexpectedly severe. All the dainty luxuries and winged liberties were to be exchanged for the convict's cup of skilly and shot-exercise. Mr. Lambert visited him once or twice in his cell during the earlier stage of durance. I ventured timidly to request my master to ask Godfrey if he would like to see me. We had been friends anyhow, I said, with something like a sob; for it is a curious fact that while genuine kindness is often remembered with a grudging reluctance, mere professions are generally recalled with stormy and unreasonable tenderness. Mr. Lambert consented to take my message, though he

looked grave, and when he returned I am sure he only delivered Godfrey's words in full, because he thought they were the best medicine for my case — "He did not want to see me. I might be well enough in my way, but as weak as water—a regular little fool."

Only a week after Godfrey's sentence we all discovered the reason of David Wills's strict economy. He was going to be married. The young lady was an orphan nursery governess, with nothing to add to his savings but her own, still smaller. "But our wants are but simple," said David brightly, "and Kate's life is very hard now, and lonely into the bargain. So we think we can venture, especially as my salary is rising, though slowly."

I was not invited to the wedding, which was so quiet as to have but one guest, the bride's old aunt, who lived in some guild almshouse at Holloway, and with whom the young couple had been accustomed to take tea between services on Sundays. They were married at their old chapel, David Wills quietly walking out from Calvert Terrace at just about the same time as he usually started for the counting-house.

"But I would throw an old shoe after him for all that," said Mrs. Summers, between laughing and



crying, "for he's been a real gentleman all through, and has let me take all sorts of advantage of him that I never need have done if it had not been for that palavering young scamp of a Godfrey. Why, only the week before he got his deserts he'd promised that faithful to pay me that I left myself so short on Saturday night I had to ask that dear good creature to let me have the loan of his looking-glass till Monday, which was to raise a little money on, and he said yes as good-natured as could be, thinking it was through some trouble of my own, for I kept that monkey's secret, knowing as Mr. Wills never owed me one shilling under another, and wouldn't hold with such ways. And now I've seen Mr. Wills look that grave for a minute this morning, that I'm bound to say he was thinking about him that's in the dismal prison. Bother him, I say, and all such, for they make trouble, and it's the only thing they give away."

If ever I have occasion to thank God for his restraining mercies, it is for those days. He saved me in spite of myself. It seems to me that there is no depth of folly, no blackness of wickedness to which I might not have been led. But there were earnest prayers rising for me, and God heard them, even while I was puzzling my empty head "whether

prayer might not be a mere mesmeric action of the will.' Verily, it is of his mercies that I was not consumed ; truly, his compassions fail not.

• It taught me not to take people at their own or others' valuation. It warned me to beware of those who promise liberty while they themselves are the servants of corruption. And it taught me the everlasting truth that whoever will be a friend of the world must be the enemy of God.

## · II.

### WHEAT AND TARES.

THE next story I shall tell is of a problem that vexed me sadly for many, many years. It was put before me while I was still quite a lad, and though I began to catch the drift of its solution a long while ago, I did not arrive at the full and complete answer till within a very few years of the present time.

In the hurry of a life rocked in a leaky mortality, it is hard to wait for the leisurely processes of Infinite Immortality. God works slowly. Man flutters among his decrees like a poor moth in a garden. Does it fancy the hard green buds will never blossom? Can it believe that the early flower already blowing was like them only a day or two ago? And presently the poor thing trembles on its wings, and drops, and dies. But the roses come out one by one in their season, and Christmas brings red berries even to the holly. If the moth had only believed!

Our firm, Lambert and Co., did business with the establishment of Knight Bros. and Cromer. Knight and Cromer were only a young firm, and then in a comparatively small way. Our Mr. Lambert liked to give a helping hand to such. This firm in particular was much indebted to him. He had advanced capital to Knight Bros., who were the sons of an old business connection of his, who had been ruined in a panic. He had often favoured them with the still more valuable loan of his honoured name. And lastly, he was the means of introducing them to their junior partner, Henry Cromer, a young man from Mr. Lambert's own county town; who not only had capital, which was of material benefit to their interests, but also a special aptitude and skill in their line of trade, and an unusual share of energy and application.

I believe the three partners first met in Mr. Lambert's counting-house. The Knights had often been there; but I remember the day when first Mr. Cromer was appointed to meet them, and their interview being by no means private, I was in and out of the counting-house whilst it went on, and heard many snatches of the conversation.

Mr. Thomas Knight was speculative, and Mr. Archer Knight was timid. Mr. Thomas was suggest-

ing that their trade was capable of much increase if prices were lowered; while Mr. Archer put in that he thought their manufactures could be carried on in a more economical way.

“When we have the amount of ready money you will bring us,” said Mr. Thomas, “our profits will be much greater, because we shall have our cash in our hand whenever the markets are favourable. And when you can invest a pound to bring in five, then with five you can go to work for twenty-five, and so on, *ad infinitum*.”

“We’ve not only had to drop advantageous purchases,” chimed in Mr. Archer, “we’ve had to sell at a loss too. It has really gone to my heart to see such splendid certainties as our connection affords us, all wasted for want of a trifle more capital.”

“Glorious chances lost, too,” said Mr. Thomas. “If I’d had a spare five hundred when the *Queen of the Sea* was freighted for Buenos Ayres, I’d have turned it into not a penny less than two thousand. But as I had not, I had to let somebody else step into my shoes.”

“But there was a risk in that,” responded Mr. Archer, “though it happened to turn out all right. I’m glad to believe that Mr. Cromer here feels with me, that it is best to keep to the slow and steady

course of business. Mr. Cromer and I must look after striking the balance, and then allow a margin for you to speculate with, Tom. Tom has a wonderful turn for speculation," he added aside, with ill-disguised admiration. "And he'd be generally right. There's a kind of luck in it."

"It is with Fortune as it is with horses," said Mr. Thomas nonchalantly; "take it with a strong hand, and it knows its master."

"And do you find your workpeople satisfied with the wages you have just named?" inquired Mr. Cromer.

"Satisfied! I should think they ought to be," returned Mr. Archer. "They have no trouble and no risk. It is the same wage that is paid everywhere."

"They know they would lose more than they would gain if they quarrelled with their bread-and-butter," said Mr. Thomas. "And they're satisfied enough. They know their cloth, and it's easy enough to cut their coat accordingly. So much work and so much money; and I'm sure it must be a nice peaceful life for those it suits."

"And as I understand they mostly live in cottages belonging to you, of course you are able to make many little arrangements that make the wage worth

nearly double in point of comfort," observed Mr. Cromer.

"Of course, of course," assented Mr. Archer eagerly; while Mr. Thomas put in—

"We always subscribe to the Free Hospital. It takes any case of accident connected with our works. Now Mr. Cromer's name is to be coupled with ours, perhaps he would like the subscription to be doubled. That will let people see that we are launching out."

I remember that Mr. Cromer looked up at the speaker keenly, and his tone was rather cold as he answered—

"There will be time enough for those changes by-and-by. But do you have many accidents in your works? I thought they were chiefly avoidable?"

"They will happen sometimes, as in the best-regulated families," Mr. Archer answered smoothly. "I dare say your experience tells you that common workpeople are lamentably careless."

Just then I was called out of the counting-house, and away to another part of the building. I did not see the Knights again. But I met Mr. Lambert and Mr. Cromer wandering together among the bales and packing-cases. Mr. Cromer had just

made some observation, which I did not hear, and Mr. Lambert replied—

“I don’t think you must draw that inference. Business men fall into this hard way of speech. I own it’s a bad habit. I only hope I have not fallen into it myself. If there is really too much of a mercenary spirit in it, you must just set your influence against it, Cromer. The Knights are but young men, and have had to struggle hard, but I have always found them very amenable to any suggestion. You must do them good, Cromer.”

Kindly Mr. Lambert! His was truly the charity that hopeth all things, believeth all things.

I afterwards became acquainted with Mr. Cromer outside business hours and places. He was recently married to an elder sister of David Wills’s young wife; and thus during their stay in London they were constant visitors at my old friend’s new little home in Holloway.

Henry Cromer had been the second son of the chief corn and grain merchant of Middleboro’, Shropshire. I could understand that the family had been affluent people after a simple country fashion. Every allusion to his boyish life was like a spring breeze, among the hyacinths of a mill-garden—full of healthy and health-giving life. They had a “shop” in the



family house in Middlebro' market-place, and a great, overflowing fruitful garden behind the "parlour," which had evidently been the general household apartment, since Henry Cromer never mentioned "the best room" except in connection with such sacred or festive occasions as the Sunday afternoon Bible reading and tea, or the Christmas cake and forfeits. Perhaps the women-folk of the establishment had sometimes carried their needlework there in the quiet of the evening, but the boys of the family had been far too free of the mill and the granary to be readily presentable among Brussels carpet and best damask. The lads had thrown themselves with hearty boyish unconsciousness among the cogs and pulleys of the little Middleboro' model of God's universe. Their father's millers and carters had delighted to make the boys those precious impromptu toys which no money can buy, and to permit and encourage them in those efforts at manly labour which is the most delightful sport to childish hearts. They had learned to reverence the rough, old veteran miller who had learned to read his Bible after he was forty years of age, and who walked twelve miles every Sunday, that he might be, in any homely way that presented itself, a loving evangelist to the neglected cotters in

the little hamlet where he was born. And they had learned, too, a humble kindly pity and fellow-feeling for poor Dick the carter, who was so helpful and honest except when he "broke out," and went "on the drink," and lay in Middleboro' gutters, a spectacle for God and man. They saw their good, stainless father forgive him again and again. They heard how Dick's parents had both been irreclaimable drunkards. And when they whispered that it was surely for no use that in his long sober intervals, poor Dick went to chapel and read his Bible, and yet always broke out again, they learned a priceless lesson from that stern old preaching miller.

"Donnot say that, lads. I donnot think it's na use to me, because I still come over black and hard-like whiles. That's my sin, and it's as bad in the Lord's eyes as Dick's, or may be worse; and perhaps I'm no' so sore tempted. The grace o' God donnot deliver us from this body o' death all at onst, but it sets us tugging at it, and that's the sign it'll be cut away at the last. If it wasn't for the grace o' God, we'd be huggin' it in our arms."

They knew the men's wives and children—all near neighbours in the quiet heart of sleepy old Middleboro'. The grave miller's wife was the family nurse, the hopeful and unfailing accompaniment to

every kind of trouble, like the silver lining to a cloud. Her eldest daughter was their maid, and married from the house in the market. Her son was Harry Cromer's greatest rival in the cricket-field; he went abroad, and did well in New Zealand, and sent home newspapers to Master Harry.

Father and mother Cromer died at last. The mill and the shop went to the eldest boy. The money in the funds came to Harry, who had already been for some time "under" a firm in the nearest manufacturing town. It was good substantial provision for both—not less and not much more than their grandfather had made for their fathers and uncles.

So Harry Cromer came into his inheritance. He had learned something during his stay in the manufacturing town, going to and fro between its purlieu of poverty and labour, and its pleasant stately suburbs of wealth and leisure. He had learned that theory is not practice, after having actually lived twenty-three years in ignorance of that fact! He had learned that in a land echoing with the sound of the Gospel of Love and Justice, a man may still lawfully take the life-blood of men, women, and children that he may coin it into gold—that a thousand poor Lazaruses must go without dripping to their bread

that Dives' oysters may be fried in fresh butter. He had learned that poor Humanity has not yet acquired that alpha of its own history, "that all men are one flesh," but boggles over it, and tries to stumble on to something easier. And then, while these truths—to him so novel and startling—were tossing and seething in his brain, the wrongs born of them suddenly found incarnation in the form of the old preacher-miller's brother, long a dweller in the town. The two old brothers must have been alike, frame and feature told that. But while the old age of the one was like some strong old fortress growing grander and grander towards decay, that of the other was like some fire-shrivelled ruin just patched up by houseless wanderers. Both good men, yet the religion of one was a courage, of the other a resignation. This had no children. They had all died young. His old wife was bedridden. Her husband said she had gone to work in a factory, years ago, when he was laid up with a fever that was in their court through "the drains," and she "had taken a bad hurt in some m'chinery that was the old sort and orkard—they'd just mended it up and thought it would do. Master had paid the doctor's bill, and given them a trifle weekly while he was attending her. That was more than most would do

—master was a good sort. But the doctor stopped coming after a bit—he said she was as well as he could make her, she'd just be better and worse accordin' to the weather. She was powerful bad when it was damp. The damp struck right through their wall, till you couldn't tell the colour of the paper. She could knit a little at times—she was a real good 'un, and didn't give up while she could go. They had a shilling a week and a loaf from the parish. His brother was very good to them. They'd ha' been clemmed without him—the Lord reward him, and his wife too, specially for the tea. It's the wife sends that. She puts a shilling, as it may be, in the letter their gal writes, and she says, 'It's for the tea, as we are too far off to have a cup together.' That's the tea, sir, and the way o' sliding it's the sugar, as one may say, sir." And the old man laughed, with his thin old lips and faded eyes.

In the stab of indignant pain, Harry Cromer suddenly left his snug lodging in the elegant suburb, and took up his abode over a chandler's shop, in a by-way among the factories, and stayed there while he remained in the town.

There he lived all the while he courted his future wife, who, like her sister, was a governess. But she was a teacher in a school kept by a very kind-hearted

woman, and they were able to have long happy talks together, in the few quiet lanes and fields which manufacturing enterprise had spared. I don't suppose their evening talks were any less sweet because the little white flowers of their own mutual love were mixed with some sturdy buds that were to blossom for other people.

There was a grand simplicity about Harry Cromer. When he saw that a thing ought not to be, he never thought of standing still to ask if it could be helped. In his godly Middleboro' home it had never been doubted that God ruled the world and not the devil, and that God could keep the world going without the devil's help. The words "expediency" and "exigency" might have been left out of the dictionary, for all the use he made of them. To know that an evil existed was but the first step to combat it. He must throw his little capital, and all his skill, and energy, and perseverance into this warfare. He could not begin single-handed, because his money was not sufficient without plant or connection, and thus he had thankfully accepted Mr. Lambert's advice and introduction. He had no lurking consciousness of philanthropy. He only wanted to do his straightforward duty—to provide things honest in the sight of all men, to build up a home

whose foundation should not be dead men's bones, cemented with the blood of broken hearts. In plain truth, Harry Cromer sincerely believed in God, all-knowing and all-powerful; in Christ, with the image of humanity crystallized in his heart of love; and in a judgment to come, whose fierce sunlight shall burn up hypocrisies and conventionalism. And sincere belief involves corresponding action.

I saw him and his wife frequently during the few weeks between his agreement with the Knights and their final removal to their new home in the vicinity of the factory. Mrs. Cromer was a pleasing, bright woman, with that sort of beauty which grows spontaneously from cheerfulness and activity. She was full of sympathy with her husband's views and plans, but I thought not quite so sanguine, though to his most daring suggestions she never gave a response more than a smiling "we can but try." She had cordially joined in his scheme of living near his business, though both of his new partners had fully represented to her that the Kingsland Road was not a particularly pleasant suburb, it was so depressing to live amongst poor people, and there was no nice walk at hand, nor any very good shops. But Mrs. Cromer had put aside all objections in her own firm, pleasant way. She had a great affection for her

brother-in-law, David Wills, and I think he must have told her something of my blunders and troubles, for almost from the beginning she had that sort of indulgent, elder-relation manner towards me, which people are apt to have when they know more about one than one thinks. It gave me courage to accept their kindly invitation to visit them whenever I pleased, and I went for the first time about two months after they were settled, going on Saturday evening in company with David, whose wife was just then detained at home by the arrival of a baby.

Their home was in the high-road. They rented it of the Knights. It was a plain brick house, rather dingy in appearance, though its paint was fresh, and Mrs. Cromer had already started a Virginian creeper over the door. The rooms were somewhat mean in their proportions, but the building had the redeeming feature of a long, old back garden. They had found it dreadfully neglected, and choked up with weeds and rubbish, but it had a pear-tree and a young elm, and when the rank undergrowth was cleared away there remained sundry firs and laurels, not so flourishing as they might become, but still good enough to make a pleasant shrubbery for the lighter plants that Mrs. Cromer was already planting out. Mrs. Cromer was a London-bred woman, but a



born gardener, though in her own opinion "she could just manage simple things that only wanted plenty of water and a little common sense."

I was struck almost immediately by a transformation that seemed already to have taken place between these two. It was she who was brightly confident now, and he who was thoughtfully serious. She called us from one wonderful discovery of possible beauty and service to another. Everything was just as it should be, or if unmistakably not so, at least just in happy accordance with some whim of hers on that particular subject.

"Was not the pear-tree a great deal prettier for the funny crook in it? It put her in mind of those people who have some racy oddity that makes them all the pleasanter. Harry was afraid it would not bear fruit, or if it did, that it would not be worth much. She believed it would, if not this year, then next. Wouldn't it be nice to send one's own pears to one's friends? But if it didn't, never mind. One could buy fruit in Leadenhall Market easily enough, but not pear-blossoms, and aren't they sweet?" and she broke off a little snowy twig, and handed it to me, saying that she thought she liked fruit blossoms better than other flowers. They seemed nobler. They were the beginning of something more; like

a pleasant word before a kind action, and if her poor tree could not get beyond the blossom, they must take the will for the deed, as they'd take a good wish from people who had nothing else to give; and now we had better go and find out what Harry and David were talking about. For they had wandered to the farther end of the garden, and Harry Cromer's voice brought back on the wind sounded rather sad and serious.

"The Knights know nothing about their work-people," he was saying. "In fact, they are always shifting. Their number is reduced whenever there is the least slackness, and they are left to find work elsewhere if they can."

"But we get a hold on those who live in Archer's Rents," put in Mrs. Cromer, "for they generally come back to the factory when they can."

"Poor things!" sighed Harry Cromer. "When I am eating my meals, I often wonder which morsel is paid for by the profit of Archer's Rents. You know they belong to our firm, and are mostly tenanted by the hands. (There I go again! Annie, always pull me up whenever I say 'hands.' It is a word born of the man-market and the slave-gang.) And you may guess where one's landlord is also one's master; it is not always easy to remind him

that the roof leaks, and that the walls have not been whitewashed for three years. I cannot get the Knights to move in this matter. I believe Mr Thomas thought I meant to insult him when I asked how he would like his mother to live in such a place. He said, quite angrily, that if I understood these people I would know they preferred a place where they could indulge their free-and-easy habits of dirt and idleness, better than any set-up notions of cleanliness and decency."

"I am going to give a slip of mignonette from this bed to every little girl in Archer's Rents," said Mrs. Cromer in a soft aside to me.

"Then the machinery we have been using is a downright robbery," pursued Harry Cromer. "There was a new invention brought in about four years ago, which facilitated labour so much, that the payment for piece-work could be lowered, and yet with advantage to the worker. It was introduced in the work-room at the time, and the wage-scale adjusted to suit it. But by-and-by it got out of gear, and as it was rather expensive to repair, the old slower machine was brought back, but the wage-scale was never readjusted. It is in the women's and children's department; and that was such a hard season that they were afraid to grumble, and I

believe the new girls who had taken their place since do not understand the difference in the wheel-work. And at last some pulley has broken and nearly killed a little boy."

"But the other machine has been repaired now, and they will begin to work it on Monday," observed his wife cheerfully. "You have succeeded in that endeavour, Harry; and I have persuaded two or three of the girls to put the extra pence they will earn into the savings-bank. I am going with them, for it is a very awful and awkward undertaking in their eyes, and they're afraid the clerk might be saucy."

"Why, I think you may report splendid progress, Harry," said Wills.

Mr. Cromer shook his head. "It is the spirit I meet that daunts me," he answered. "The Knights think I am mad. They rarely contradict me flatly, or straightforwardly refuse what I ask. If they would do so, and let us argue it out between us, I should have hope; but they put me off civilly, and try to shut me up in a moral straight-jacket. They tacitly say to me that I shall come round presently and be as sane as they are. They give me to understand they were once as I am, and that they can admire the generous enthusiasm of ignorance and

inexperience, but that there is a time for everything and that this must pass away. O David! shall I ever live to eat, and drink, and make merry, and think of Archer's Rents and the factory only as a sordid safe, whence I take my money? Thomas Knight laughs and says he was sure how it would be when I came to live so near. If I went to and fro every day to some nice part of the West End, or a little way out of town, and made a rule to relieve my mind with a concert or a party, I should be all right. David, shall I live to shut my conscience in a box like that? How black and bitter it will be when it will have to be looked upon at last! Archer Knight sympathizes with me in his own fashion. He tried living here once himself, he says. Lodgings were cheaper, and it spared travelling fares, and he wanted to save money. But the people did not know how to let one alone; they'd come after hours, when anybody was dying suddenly, or being born unseasonably, and beg for the advance of a shilling or two. He says it is too much of a strain for the nervous system, and bids me think of my wife, and take care of myself, for health is sooner lost than regained, and everything else is generally lost with it; and then he tells me of this merchant or that manufacturer who had paralysis, or slow softening

of the brain, and died in want, and left families to beggary; and then he shakes his head, adding that charity begins at home, and that while we are pitying others we must take care not to become pitiable ourselves."

"My compliments to Mr. Archer," said Mrs. Cromer playfully, "and I shall not go to beggary in a hurry. Am I not an experienced governess, also a fair milliner and a decent seamstress? He that hath a trade hath an estate."

Her husband looked at her with a serious smile. "But worst of all," he went on, "the work-people mistrust me. They wonder what I am after. They think I want to give an inch to blind their eyes while I take an ell."

"Why should they trust us till they have tried us?" asked his wife, putting her hand through his arm. "They will trust us then. Archer's Rents didn't half like my first visits, though I never went without some excuse about washing, or needlework, or so forth. But it has liked me well enough since I ran in without my gloves, that afternoon that little Dick Hunter hurt his back in the engine-room. 'Here's the missis,' they said, and somebody asked, 'How did you know o' the accident, mum?' I just said I heard the child scream as he was carried out

of the works, and the doctor was coming as fast as he could, for I had spoken in at the surgery as I passed. And then they let me make myself quite at home, and helped me to get off Dick's poor little rats as he lay struggling on my knee, and of her own accord one woman brought a clean sheet for the hard bed: 'It was a sin not to lay the little chap down clean when you didn't know when he'd move again,' she said, 'and the doctor a-coming too.' Poor little Dick, he put up his face to kiss me before I left him that night. Between the pain and the opiate, he didn't know me then, but he has kissed me every day since. I must not miss going to see him this evening. Perhaps you will come with me, Mr. Garrett. I think we may leave Harry to entertain David."

It was my first experience of "visiting the poor." It is always hard to recall one's fancy after one has got the fact, but I believe I had a preconceived notion that "the poor" made a curtsey and dusted a chair, and answered every question with the fullest confidence, being addressed by their unprefix'd surname. I must have got that idea from somewhere, and I do not think it is quite individual to my own inexperience. All my life long I have been grateful to Mrs. Cromer for the new light she gave me.

Archer's Rents was a small court opening from a street off the Kingsland Road, and consisting of about six high, tumble-down old houses. Everybody in Archer's Rents was very poor, Mrs. Cromer told me as we went along, but these Hunters were about the poorest of them all—little Dick could at most only earn three shillings a week in the factory, and his grandmother, who sold iron-holders, skewers, and such other trifles, was often deprived of such poor possibility of gain by attacks of rheumatism that threatened soon to disable her entirely. There was no relation to help her or Dick. Dick's mother was her daughter, and she was still alive; but they did not know where she was. I never heard more of her history, but I think I can guess what it was.

Every room in Archer's Rents held a family. The "first-floor fronts" mostly took in "boarders" as well. The Hunters lived in a tiny little third room on the ground-floor. I suppose its window must have been partly blocked up, for even its dirt could not wholly account for the little light it gave—scarcely enough to enable me to distinguish its occupants.

"How do you do, Mrs. Hunter?" said my companion cheerfully, stepping straightforward into the unsavoury gloom. "I've brought somebody else to



see Dick. Poor Dick is used to seeing so many people, he must find it rather dull to see only us, Mrs. Hunter."

"Deary me, miss," grumbled a cross voice from what seemed a heap of rags on the hearth. "Your knock just wakened me out o' the sweetest bit o' nap I've had since a fortnight come Monday. I gets none at night, the lad's that uneasy; and it comes hard, it do, to one at my time o' life. What's the 'ospittles for, if it's not for the likes o' me, that's had my share o' troubles a-bringing up six of 'em, that one way or another ha' never paid back a pen'orth."

"You see, the man who was with Dick, when he was hurt, did not think it was so serious at first," said Mrs. Cromer soothingly. "He fancied you'd make it all well directly. And now the doctor says it would hurt Dick to move him."

"It'll kill him to lie here, I reckon," said the old woman recklessly. "I ain't like a reg'lar nuss. If it's anything in the orange line, I'm up to it, and I knows about matches, and I've taken a turn at the pickle-pottin' in my time; but I never did no nussin'. My two boys both died in 'ospittle, and my old man was took off in a fit at the p'lice station. It was printed in the newspapers, his name and all, and the bobbies near got in for it. The gals, they never

wanted no physicking, 'cept a good sound box o' the ear, and they wanted that oftener nor they got it—so I never done no nussin'. Dick ain't havin' a fair chance. How can I be expected to nuss like a woman that's a-sippin' her tea and her gin, and a-pickin' at all manner o' good things all day long? I never professes to be a nuss—I don't."

"I'd rather stay with you, granny," piped a weak little treble from the bed. "'Ospittle's strange. And they wouldn't let Jack in—poor Jack."

"Ah, Dick, dearie," said Mrs. Cromer, bending to kiss a tiny head that came poking up from the bed-clothes, "how are you to-day? And how is Jack? Mr. Garrett, this is our friend Jack. Jack is the best dog in the world; isn't he, Dick? Talking of nurses, Mrs. Hunter, we quite forgot Jack, who, I believe, is a better nurse than any of us."

And the little figure on the bed put out its thin hand and laid the dog's paw on the woman's ragged arm. She shook it in a rough, but not unkindly way. "Seems a rum thing that we should keep you, that can't keep ourselves," she said.

"I've brought something for Jack," said Mrs. Cromer, "and something for Dick. But Jack must wait till his master is done, therefore Jack's master

must eat his supper very heartily and readily, for we want to see Jack take his." And, rising from her seat, she lit a candle that stood in a black bottle on the mantelshelf, and then opened a little basket which she had brought with her, and produced a dainty white china plate, with a shape of calf's-foot jelly upon it, and a silver spoon. If a fairy brought a crystal goblet of nectar to a rich valetudinarian, I don't suppose it would interest and excite him as these simple delicacies interested and excited little Dick. He must not be moved. She could only just raise his head slightly from the pillow.

I could see him better now in the dim candle-light; and, sitting watching him, I wondered how he had looked when he was going to and fro, a little dirty working boy, in grimy smock and breeches; just like thousands whom we push aside on our pathways. For he was not a specially pretty child, and I dare say he had once yelled and halloed, and played at "cat," and all other pranks which are thought just beautiful, touching animal spirits in the fine boys of the grand old endowed schools, but only sheer impudence and bad behaviour on the part of stratty factory brats, who ought to be kept in order by the police! But now the dirt was washed away, and the bed-gown was as clean and neat as need be,

—the loan of a poor widow sempstress, a relic of her own boy who had died in better days. All those outer differences, with which the devil delights to cheat man into forgetfulness of the universal brotherhood, were vanished. Something else had come in their stead. I was but an inexperienced lad then, and did not know what it was that touched the childish brow with sublimity.

Mrs. Cromer had some meat for Jack, done up in a piece of paper; and he was lifted upon the bed that his master might see him enjoy it; Mrs. Cromer telling me, meanwhile, how Dick had found him starving in the street one snowy morning, and had taken care of him, and Jack had waited for him outside the factory every day ever since. It was no fault of Dick's that his care could not fill Jack's skinny ribs and thicken his shaggy coat.

"What are you thinking of, little man?" she asked gently, with her pure fair face resting against the broken post of the old bed. Jack had finished his meal, and laid himself down contentedly under his master's hand, which was absently patting the rough brown head.

Dick did not take his eyes from Jack. "Granny told the doctor she was sure I wouldn't get better," he said, "and he didn't say I would."

"Are you afraid, dear?" she said tenderly. "You must not be afraid. There is ~~SOMEbody~~ who loved little children so dearly, that He came all the way from the glorious sky to take them in his arms, and say, 'Of such is the kingdom of heaven.' He will take care of you, little Dick?"

"But will He take care of Jack when I'm gone?" said the boy, and a great heavy tear fell on the dog's head, and made him shake his ragged ears.

Mrs. Cromer paused, only for a moment, and then answered in her sweet voice, calm for all its sound of tears—

"Yes, Dick; for He has put it into my heart to take Jack home with me directly you don't want him any more."

"Have He! O poor old Jack, won't you have a jolly berth!" And the boy lay quiet, smiling, for a while. "You said as Somebody knows everything as is going on. Can he hear us speaking in here?"

"Yes, dear; He can even hear you, thinking."

"And what did you say Somebody's name was? I ain't heard it often, and my head is queer like."

"Jesus Christ,—the Lord Jesus."

"I want to say 'Thank ye' to Him. Lord Jesus Christ—thank you for looking arter poor Jack. It's easy enough to love you when you're so good."

I don't think I'll feel strange where you are, and if I don't remember your name right, please don't be angry, but teach me. Help granny to sell her matches, and don't let the parish take off a loaf because I ain't here."

The last words died in a shiver of agony, and he turned his face to the wall. But presently he looked round, whispering, "He heard me: I sorter saw His eyes inside me,—something like yours they was, only a deal kinder and awfuller even. Won't you kiss me now, please, for I'm dropping off asleep?"

She bent down and kissed him, but a motion of her hand explained to the grandmother and me what she knew was coming. The old woman gave one low weary groan, and sat quite still.

Dick's eyes closed, his hand remaining on Jack's head. The candle grew snuffy and dim. Nobody stirred. Till at last Jack gave a little plaintive moan, and Mrs. Cromer rose softly, saying—

"Dick is better off than any of us now."

And the grandmother broke out in loud and bitter wailing, and fellow-lodgers crowded in, with their help and sympathy,—the restless tide of life beating up against the solemn shore, whereon this one little bark was just anchored above high-water mark. Mrs. Cromer sent me away, with hasty

directions to wait for her outside the Rents ; nor did she join me for fully half an hour.

She had been weeping. We did not speak till we had walked some paces.

"Jack will not leave him to-night," she said. "The people will be good to the dog."

That was the only word that passed till we were within a few yards of her own house. Just then, going leisurely home after an evening's study of his ledgers, we met Archer Knight.

"Mrs. Cromer!" he exclaimed, as a gas-light fell full on her face, "this is scarcely a neighbourhood for you to traverse at this hour, without a more efficient escort."

"I have just come from Archer's Rents," she said, and there was a clear high ring in her tone. "Mr. Knight, I was just wishing you had been there too. I think it is a providence that I met you. Will you turn back with us? Do not refuse. It is the first favour I have asked you, and I ask it for your own sake."

There was something about her which overruled his half-contemptuous, half-indignant remonstrance.

"I will go anywhere that you command me," he said, with an affectation of suavity ; "but don't think me a brute if my emotions will not quite come

up to your standard. I know these people: they can get up very pretty tableaux to impress such ladies as you; but we men, who have to take business into consideration, must deal with them in a common-sense way, or they would bring us to the workhouse in no time."

She did not answer a word, but stepped on swiftly before us.

"Mrs. Cromer is a wonderfully good walker," said Archer Knight, with a sneer, speaking aside to me.

Archer's Rents was unusually quiet, with the exception of one house, where they had charitably taken in the grandmother, and where in consequence all the other women had already drifted. The sound of many voices came through its open window, but the speakers were all too self-absorbed to notice our stealthy footsteps up the alley. The Hunters' house was in utter darkness, but Mrs. Cromer did not falter, and Mr. Knight followed her all unconscious. I heard her walk straight into the chamber where I knew the dead was lying. There was the flash of a lucifer, an angry growl from poor Jack, and Mrs. Cromer stood, candle in hand, beside the thin little corpse on its squalid bed.

Archer Knight cried out in the shock of surprise



and horror, but there was no one to hear. Mrs. Cromer said not a word. Jack, immovable from the dead boy's side, growled fiercely and showed his teeth at the stranger. We all stood so for many minutes.

Then the spell that was on her seemed to break and vanish in a long, shivering sigh. "We shall meet little Dick again some day," she murmured. "I wonder what we shall all think about it then?" And she turned round, set down the light, and suddenly extinguished it. Archer Knight stumbled hastily from the room, and waited for us in the open court.

Mrs. Cromer did not say one word to him as we retraced our steps. The moon was out soft and clear, silvering the sordid hovels around us. Archer Knight himself was the first to speak.

"You ought not to go into such scenes," he said. "I can understand how they must affect you. Of course we ought to give help, send money or nourishment, or so on. It was only by an awful mistake that boy wasn't taken off to the hospital, and then one knows everything is all right, and one need not be harrowed up. However, my dear lady, do not distress yourself any more, that accident cannot happen again. That stupid old machine has

been removed this very day. I'm sure I wish we had attended to your husband when he first spoke about it. It might just as well have been done first as last."

I should not have known Mrs. Cromer's voice, as, with a chill monotony of tone that froze to the very core of my heart, she repeated—

"Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil!

"Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people, and hast sinned against thy soul.

"For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it."

"Really, really," cried Archer Knight, "I had best leave you here. I honour your feelings, I admire you for them, but you do not look at this matter in the right light. The logical conclusion of your sentiments would be beggary. Some day you will own I am right. I might be hurt at the tone you have taken towards me, but I appreciate the sympathies, though mistaken, which cause it. Good evening."

And we two returned together to the house in the Kingsland Road. Mrs. Cromer did not faint, nor

burst into tears, nor run away to her room, but sat down in her bonnet and cloak, and told our story, sadly and simply enough. Harry Cromer started up and paced the room excitedly.

“What am I to do?” he cried. “If I withdraw my capital I am powerless to serve anybody as their master, and shall have no alternative but to hire myself out, perhaps under some such firm as this, and have to connive and witness these wrongs, without even my present little power to redress. If I remain, there will be blood upon my head. What am I to do?”

“God may mean you to do nothing, but He cannot mean you to do wrong, Harry,” said his wife bravely. “As to whether you should leave the Knights or not, put it in his hand.”

“But how can we be sure of his will?” groaned her husband. “Oh, how easy and happy life went in the old way at Middleboro’!”

“Take a stand on the next wrong you see, if it be to-morrow,” said Annie Cromer; “and if it is not righted by your advice, put the alternative, that unless it be so you will retire. And be as good as your word. That will be the way God means us to go.”

I saw Harry Cromer look round the neat little

room, that showed so bright and cheerful now the lamp was lit. Must it all be left?—all his wife's planning and handiwork undone and destroyed? But his soul answered its own question, The heavenly Canaan of duty must be bartered for no mess of potage, howsoever sweet or seeming innocent.

And presently David and I rose up, and said good night, and left them to themselves.

The next we heard of them was the dissolution of partnership. On the very day of little Dick's funeral, two great European potentates declared war against each other, and one of the minor consequences was sudden trouble in the commercial world, and a great rise in the price of a commodity used in the factory of Knight and Cromer. Manufacturers, whose low stock necessitated immediate purchase, while the markets were so stagnant that they dared not raise their prices, had to lower their wages. Knight and Cromer had just laid in a sufficient stock to tide them over the calamity. It had been bought under Mr. Cromer's advice—he had old Middleboro' connections on the Continent who had warned him of the turn things were taking, although the English newspapers had continued delusively hopeful. The Knights had grumbled very much at the purchase. Archer was afraid they might lose a little, and

Thomas did not think they would gain much. They had yielded with a bad grace, but now they were in ecstasies. They had a large contract on hand to fulfil, and they would gain fifty per cent. more than if they had their money still to lay out.

"And the reduction of wages is a clear gain," said Archer, rubbing his hands.

"The wages must not be reduced," said Harry Cromer firmly. "Shall we pick from the poor man's basket when God has taken nothing from our store?"

If the brothers had put their impulsive thoughts into words, they would have exclaimed—

"The idea of talking about God in a counting-house!"

But they only tried to reason with him, and grew sharp and angry in their fear of lost profit, till at last he threw down his challenge, and they promptly accepted it. They did not think it was sincere, and Archer tried to re-open the subject afterwards, though without any hint of conviction on their part. But Harry Cromer had accepted the token, and proceeded to hasten forward their separation.

"The Knights felt themselves to be very injured men. I know they called upon Mr. Lambert, to impress upon him the damage they suffered from his

friend's withdrawal of capital at such an untoward time. He was a little inclined to sympathize with them at first, though only to the extent that perhaps Harry had been rather too hasty and enthusiastic. But other merchants sided with them heartily, and Harry had good reason to feel that they were fixing upon him an ill name, as a man whom it was impossible to work with and dangerous to rely on.

I saw the Cromers but once more in their poor, nipped Kingsland home. David and I walked out there on their last day in it, in hopes of giving a little cheering countenance to their departure. One waggon of household gods had already gone, another of rougher articles was nearly filled. Annie Cromer was going round with her watering-pot, giving a last attention to her ferns and creepers. I hinted that she might at least have hoped to transplant some of them. She shook her head. "They might die," she said, "and it's a pity to kill other people's pleasures by trying to pot 'em for one's self."

We sat down on kitchen chairs, in the empty parlour, and ate hunches of dry bread, and drank wine out of a tourist-flask. Jack went about among us, wagging his tail, and looking up at us with the strange wistfulness that comes into animal-eyes at sight of confusion and change. Suddenly there was

a slow, shuffling step in the passage, and Dick's grandmother stood in the doorway.

"I begs your pardon," she said, "but I just come to have one look at my blessed boy's old pet. Ye're goin' to take him farder than I ever been in my life. Eh, he's gettin' sleek and fat. My boy'd be pleased to see him now. He knows me, ye see. But it isn't 'cos it's me he's making the fuss. He thinks Dick can't be far off, if I'm about. He don't know that Dick can't come back—never no more. Well-a-day, if Dick had growed up, maybe he'd ha' gone away and left me of his own accord, like all my own six did. I don't think so, though; but there's never no telling. And I'm thinking ye're not so far parted from them as can't come, as ye are from *them* as won't come. Good-bye, poor old Jack. I'm feared I grudged my boy a-takin' up with you. But now I'm thinkin' I must have a cat or something of my own by-and-by. It's awful hard not to have a creature to give a bite to, arter all. Good-bye to you, mem., and a pleasant journey. An' if you're ever near this again there's more than me'll be glad if you remember Archer's Rents. We don't see so many such that we need forget ye in a hurry."

Half an hour afterwards the Cromers were gone, and the house stood empty.

They had to live in a sad, unsettled way for a long time. They warehoused their furniture, and stayed in furnished lodgings, here a week and there a week, as was indicated by chances of ultimate settlement. They were staying in Hoxton when their first child was born, among the petty hardships and struggles of a homeless existence, where the domestic wheels may never roll long enough to smooth down the road, but are always jarring over some new rut. It told heavily on Mrs. Cromer. I never saw her dull or languid; but it was in those days a wrinkle crept into her forehead, which never went away again. Harry Cromer I did often see, dull and languid enough. He was an active, energetic man, one to whom work is an essential ingredient of health and happiness. In his own words, he began to feel as "if the moss was creeping over him." It grew into physical infirmity by-and-by, and he had to call in a doctor's aid, for the first time since he had the measles in Middleboro'.

Just about that time, Mr. Thomas Knight was married. His bride was the daughter of a railway contractor, well known for enterprise and wealth. The wedding took place in a fashionable West-end church, with a choral service and two baronet's daughters among the bridesmaids, and we chanced to



hear that the bridegroom had taken a splendid "place" at Surbiton, which was being furnished with every grandeur and luxury of ancient art or modern convenience. It was quite supererogatory to Thomas Knight's own position or income, but perhaps his bride had enough of both to justify, or at least excuse, the extravagance. At any rate, her father's name was as good as a bank, and credit could be had almost without the asking.

It was then that I began to vex myself with hard questions about the Providence which rules the world. Was power always on the side of the oppressor? Were selfishness and injustice to have it all their own way? Was there no avenger for the poor, or for him who makes the cause of the poor his own? My raw and insincere doubts on theological evidence had vanished unnoticed, like morning clouds or any other unsubstantial thing. But these world-old questions, the same that perplexed the troubled household of Uz, did not pass so easily—"Wherefore do the wicked live, become old; yea, are mighty in power? They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men. They are corrupt, and speak wicked oppression." I felt ready to ask, "Doth God know? is there knowledge in the Most High? Are not these the ungodly, who pros-

per in the world, who increase in riches?" And to doubt the providence of God is presently to wax impatient with his commands. Asaph found it so when he recorded his consciousness that "his feet were almost gone: his steps had well-nigh slipped," because he thought, "Verily he had cleansed his heart in vain, and washed his hands in innocency." I found it so too, for the Bible touches that wondrous cord of affinity that runs from Adam to ourselves, and will run to the men who shall gather the last sheaves and bear the last burdens of this world of ours. Where trust is disturbed, reverence is soiled, and obedience hesitates.

My self-questionings became so vehement that I could not help hinting them timidly to the few among my acquaintances who would have any sympathy with such things. I told the story, with the names "in blank," to our old head-clerk, who said that he thought wicked people were enough punished in their own consciences. That did not satisfy me at all. I felt quite certain that their consciences never disturbed Thomas or Archer Knight, nay, that Harry and Annie Cromer were far more troubled as to whether they had done their utmost. I think it would astonish many good people if they would ascertain how little stress inspired writers put on the witness of conscience

to the wicked. They speak of conscience often enough as excusing or accusing those who honestly desire the right, and repent of the wrong. It is the least sinner, and not the greatest, who feels most remorse. When I ventured to hint to the head-clerk that I thought most godless people would find the pricks of conscience very endurable, he answered, with just a little asperity, that was the worst punishment of all, and if I envied that, I had better prefer mortification to health, because it could not feel a smart. Dear good man, his retort hit the mark a great deal nearer than his axiom.

Somebody else quoted Bacon's words, that "prosperity was the blessing of the Old Testament, adversity the blessing of the New," but that did not satisfy me; for it was not David or Solomon, but Paul, who taught that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

David Wills did not appear able to enter into my difficulties, though he gave them a kindly ear. "Of course, good people are the blessed of the earth," he said. "'Better is a little that the righteous hath, than great revenue without right.' Good people are contented, and that is greater wealth than all the argosies of the sea could bring from all the mines of the

world. Did I think that the wicked got everything their hearts desired? They could not get everything while they were wicked, for every man's heart wanted God, and without Him it must go on empty and hungering for ever. Did I think they got an unfair share of the world's good? Would I prefer a large rotten apple to a small sound one, especially if that was the very best from my only tree, while this was but a poor sample from a fair orchard that was all for me? Goodness is happiness and badness is misery. The beatitude of heaven is not its golden pavement and its crystal sea, but its sinless souls. Heaven begins in every purified heart on earth, though it can grow but faintly, like a tender plant under a dim glass. For his own part, he thought there was something awfully tragic about a godless man's prosperity."

I could not then quite appreciate this reasoning, but I instinctively felt there was something in it. It kept me from openly admitting to my heart my misgivings concerning God's omnipotence and justice. They would creep in slyly at side doors, sometimes, but I always bundled them out with a struggling self-assurance that it was all right somehow, and it would all come right in the end. Nevertheless, I own my faith was much such as a drowning man

may have in the last rope that remains for him to cling to. It did not restrain me from taking somewhat moody and misanthropic views of life, and speaking bitter things with all the deep sagacity and wide experience that might naturally be expected from my tender years and moderate endowments.

Mr. Cromer settled again at last. He started in business by himself, in a very, very small way, in the neighbourhood of Deptford. His accounts and correspondence were so insignificant, that he perched a very juvenile clerk in the counting-house, and put on an apron and went into the factory himself. I believe Annie Cromer helped and superintended the juvenile clerk at times, for I have seen business letters which I am sure had her individuality in the wording, and were none the less clear and succinct for it.

There are not many people of the trade of the Knights and Harry Cromer; and the Knights were extraordinarily alarmed at the new competition, considering what a small and feeble thing it was, and under the management of a man whom they professed to consider foredoomed to failure and ruin. Harry Cromer only competed with them in one branch of business. In that they resolved to keep their prices down, even if they must sell at a loss to do it.

This was a staggering blow to meet poor Cromer at the very outset. But the renewal of unfettered activity had brought him a renewal of his old energy and hopefulness. Then one or two encouragements came in. Mr. Lambert, who had adhered to his old connection with the Knights, and had never been solicited by Harry Cromer to do otherwise, suddenly withdrew his custom from the Kingsland firm, and sent a large order to the struggling factory at Deptford. It was a serious help. It would at least enable the few work-people to be kept on, and the semblance of vitality to be maintained. But it brought also fresh determination and pluck for the battle. A hope of victory makes effort and sacrifice easy.

They let their spare bed-room to a boarder. Mrs. Cromer cleared away the pretty knick-knacks from her drawing-room, and turned out her old atlases and musical exercises, and took pupils. She got several. One of her husband's workwomen was the daughter of a monthly nurse, and the old woman spoke so highly of her daughter's mistress to the lady she was attending, that the lady instantly put her five daughters under Mrs. Cromer's care. I strongly suspect Mrs. Cromer found some other sources of profit, which she did not make so generally public. Business required me to call upon them very often

about that time, and I repeatedly caught her busy upon sketches which never afterwards made their appearance either on her walls or in her portfolio. I am sure I saw one of them in a shop-window in Fleet Street ; and as I was just then anxious to send a little token of remembrance to my sister Ruth, I went in and bought it. It was cheap enough !

The hard time passed at last. The Knights grew tired of their losing game. What is the use of ruining people who don't seem to know when they are ruined—who, in fact, will not ruin ? There was again a fair field for Harry Cromer. But the boarder and the pupils were not too hastily discontinued, and I think the sketching went on as briskly as ever for a long time.

Presently, work-people in the neighbourhood of Deptford began to grumble that Mr. Cromer wanted so few of them. "It was a rare fine thing to be under him. Of course, he keeps to the trade customs of hours and wages, and such like. But there's a difference somehow. There's never no pretence made for docking off sixpences, and the place is kept as clean and ajsome as a palace. I tell my wife, if she can't match it at home, I'll just stay and sleep under my bench. And Mrs. Cromer does not have her things sqt from some of the fine London

shops, but just deals where we deal, and the articles there is better and cheaper too since she came; and they've took two or three pews in the church, and every man, woman, or child that works in their shop has a right to go and sit in 'em, like lords. They've done the same at the chapel, to give everybody their choice. And Mr. Cromer, he's allowed the doctor something to look after any of us that's ill, and as long as he says we can't work we get our wages in full; and master and missis both, they lay themselves out to help ye in any way ye want. Missis'll write a dozen letters trying to get a girl a situation at service. But I forgot to tell you when any man is ill as ever gets drunk, or lives in a dirty room, he doesn't get his full wages—never more nor half. Master put it to us plain. He can't interfere with our bad habits, he says, he ain't no right to; but then he ain't no right to pay for 'em, says he. And we can see that's square and fair. We can see sense when it's put to us as if we was men. All I can say, it's a pity Mr. Cromer ain't able to employ double what he does; but he do shame other masters into acting a bit more up to their duty."

The very summer that I stood on Greenwich pier listening to these encomiums of my old friend, cholera swept over London. In the statistical re-



ports I read that there had been at least one death in every house in Archer's Rents. I wondered how it was that its appalling squalor and indecency had not called down the special censure of the Board of Health. Being presently in that neighbourhood, I could not forbear going to look at the old place. I found it duly whitewashed. This had been done, an old woman told me, just before "the sickness" came. There it stood, scarcely shaded as yet, a whited sepulchre, fitting type of the men who owned and profited by it.

Well, they're all dead now—Thomas Knight, Archer Knight, and Harry Cromer. Thomas Knight went first, fully fifteen years ago. He made a very large fortune, but his wife's father died rather poor, after all, and the unpleasantness caused by the disappointment was so great that the husband and wife separated immediately after. Thomas Knight had always been accustomed to boast loudly that he had never made an unlucky hit, and the idea of the ridicule this mistake would bring upon him preyed quite disproportionately upon his spirits. He took to drinking, and there used to be all sorts of rumours about the quantity of brandy he could swallow. He died suddenly; in a fit, the family said, but there were suspicious circumstances which made

most people believe that he died of injuries self-inflicted in delirium tremens. He had two sons by his wife during their brief union, but he had quarrelled with them both, and cut them off with small legacies, leaving the place at Surbiton, and the bulk of his property (which was very large) to his brother Archer, who had remained a bachelor.

Harry Cromer died next, not so very long after Thomas Knight. He had been rather feeble for some time, but his sons had been old and steady enough to relieve him from all labour and anxiety. He lived long enough to see aged workmen of his own as staunch and weather-worthy as his father's good old miller in Middleboro', while not one of his regular work-people had fallen upon the "rates." He had not made money. He left his business, now in a state of quiet prosperity, to his boys. His only daughter was happily married to a young doctor, who was more than satisfied with the few hundreds which his father-in-law advanced him towards the purchase of a practice, and there was just enough money to buy a comfortable annuity for his dear wife, the principal, on her death, to be divided among their three children, "in the assured hope that they will make whatever they may have a blessing to all around them."

Annie Cromer still lives—an old, old lady, with silver hair and soft dim eyes. I go to see her sometimes. She still resides at Deptford, in her daughter's house, and the children are so fond of her that it is quite a pleasure to see the pretty family picture. She has ~~funny~~ old women who come to take tea with her sometimes. They are all younger than her, for they were in her sewing school and Bible class when they were buxom lasses and she was a fair young lady. She knows all about each of them, and never makes a mistake as to what children and grandchildren she has to inquire after, and can go accurately into all kinds of details about old times. Indeed, her daughter says proudly that her faculties are quite perfect, except that once or twice she has spoken as if she forgot her husband was dead, and that she has a curious fancy that her little granddaughter Katie is a little Katie of her own, who died forty years ago.

And it was the announcement of Archer Knight's will in the newspaper this morning that reminded me of this old perplexity of mine. He died only a few weeks back at the Mansion, Surbiton, and his fortune, the united accumulation of both brothers, is returned as under, £250,000.

O poor, poor, poor Archer Knight! For the

poverty that you dreaded more than sin came upon you in all your wealth. Something in your brain gave way some years ago. One fibre—no more. You were no madman. You could still thread the intricacies of the money column. You could still scent afar off those political changes which influence City circles. Only why should you trouble yourself any more about such things, when you knew you were a pauper—a pauper, too, who in vain besieged the guardians of the poor for the meagre dole of out-door relief? You used to go and clamour at their gates, and wail and imprecate when they sent you empty away. But your nephews arranged it for you at last. They were not a bad sort of young men. They took your business into their hands, and they knew your fortune would be theirs when you died. But they did not want to shorten your days by shutting you up and baulking your poor crazed whims. Why not indulge your harmless fancy? So they persuaded the guardians' clerk to dole you out a weekly half-crown of your own money, with sundry loaves paid for by the same. And you used to go home and sit in a bare attic of your splendid mansion, and study the best way to lay out your pence in meal and molasses. You found they would not go far enough without aid. I myself

have seen you stand at your mansion gates, hat in hand, cringingly grateful when any pitying neighbour humoured you with a copper.

O poor, poor, poor Archer Knight! And can you see little Dick where you are now? '

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I need not have been afraid that God would forget His judgment. Had I not His word? He need not go out of his way to punish. Shall not the wheel of His decree roll on to the portal of eternity?

"The fear of the wicked it shall come upon him, but the desire of the righteous shall be granted."

### III.

#### THE WISDOM OF FOOLS.

I LIVED under Mrs. Summers's roof at 8, Calvert Terrace, till after my twentieth birthday, by which time my salary was high enough to permit me to think I might reside where more attention was paid to the *convenances* of life.

There were holes in the passage cloth at No. 8. Mr. Bartram did not seem to notice them, but they began to vex my fastidious soul. Then there was an awkward crook in the staircase which one had to explain to any stranger who happened to call. And then there seemed no method in the household arrangements. The word "method" cast a sort of spell over me just at that time. I think I had heard a lecture upon it, or something of the sort. I remember I used to tell Biddy, the Irish maid-of-all-work, that she had no method in stirring the fire, and gave her many good and scientific lessons thereon, with illustrations, which always ended in my declaring

that there must be something utterly wrong with the coal or the grate, or the fire would burn up beautifully, instead of going out as it generally did, unless I surrendered it to the unscientific Biddy in the middle of the lesson. There seemed to me to be no fixed days for cleaning down the house, or doing the washing. It might generally be Friday or Monday, as the case might be, but the exceptions seemed to prevent it being a rule. I began to consider that poor Mrs. Summers had but a happy-go-lucky way of managing matters, and that after all, one had no right to expect more from a common uneducated woman, who, I did not suppose, ever studied any book except the Bible and the Cook's Guide.

The fact was, I had just made some new acquaintances of a different stamp. After the collapse of my fellowship with Fred. Godfrey, I had been very thankful to obtain David Wills's introduction to his Literary Institute. Then, waxing intemperate in my zest for knowledge, I had not been satisfied with it, but had also joined a scientific association, whose subjects and aims were far more abstruse and ambitious.

Now, one of the most indefatigable of the students of this Association was a young man named Stephen Black. He attended nearly all the classes, gathering

up his books, and rushing from one department to another. He must have been six or seven-and-twenty years of age, looked older, wore spectacles, and was always dressed in black garments of quaint, careless fashion. He never "went in" for any of the prizes or scholarships, of which the Association boasted some of considerable value. So, though at first I had thought him but an odd sickly sloven, I presently felt that a man so devoted to the pursuit of knowledge purely for its own sake, could not be expected to descend to such frivolities as the hue or fashion of his garments. In one class—I think it was that of Zoology—he was always joined by a middle-aged woman, who took copious notes from the teacher's words. She was a tall thin person, quite fifty, with a wedding-ring on her left hand. I could see she might be Stephen's mother, but I could not bring myself to believe it. I never spoke to these people until I found myself seated beside the elderly lady on the occasion of the Christmas *soirée*. Then, in the course of a few desultory remarks, she spoke of Stephen Black as "her son."

What made her watch the effect of this disclosure with a microscopic eye? "Ah," said she, "you can't understand a mother coming to a class, can you? Women have no right to cultivate their



minds, have they? They have no right to have minds to cultivate, eh? But, my dear Mr. Garrett (for Stephen has often named you), you ought to be too young to have these old prejudices."

I indignantly repudiated them. I had the highest idea of female intellect. I considered women to be our equals—not to say our superiors. But one had to depend on the ladies for information about themselves—and they had always given me to understand that when they were—I meant when they had households to look after, they found their hands quite full, often overflowing.

"Ah," she said, shaking her head, "I know they think so, poor dears. If you chained up a puppy from its birth, it would think it could walk no farther than its chain. Now, do you think that God meant women only to make jellies and gruels, and sew buttons? I put it to you plainly, Mr. Garrett, as to an intelligent young gentleman, do you really believe this?"

"But then they say somebody must do these things, and that they take up so much time," I responded, parrying her home-thrust.

"All want of method," she said, succinctly folding her hands, and making an emphatic pause before she proceeded. "Women do not understand order.

They do not understand the relative value of things, poor souls; they have not enjoyed generations of mathematical training, as men have."

• I was confounded by a vision of my mathematical training—a nightmare of an Euclid, tear-stained to the first ten problems, and virgin-clean farther on!

"If women only understood the trivial nature of their duties, they could never waste their whole lives over them," Mrs. Black went on. "It is quite unnecessary waste. For household management should be arranged like a beautifully perfect machine. There should be a place and a time for everything, and no deviations allowed, and then the domestic wheels would go quite easily, without any watching. Women not only make their blunder, but they worship it. If they would but believe it, the world does not want their possets and their puddings so much as their minds. I can speak boldly on these subjects, because I can testify from my own experience. I have to manage a household—not a small one either, for we live in one of the great old-fashioned houses near Queen Square. We have only one servant, an inferior one—all servants are nowadays; and besides ourselves (that, is my son Stephen, myself, and my two daughters Mary and Joanna), we have, as a permanent resident, dear good Professor

Gessler of this Institution, and generally one or two young gentleman-boarders. Now, it is not likely that such a man as the Professor would stay where he was not comfortable. I do not say that my table would satisfy an epicure, and my household rules are far too strict for people who need a great deal of allowance, but they are such as suit an educated and refined man like Dr. Gessler. My daughter Joanna never interferes in the house at all. Her whole time is devoted to art. She is a student at the Female School, and spends her leisure in studying from the antique at the British Museum. My dear daughter Mary has somehow retrograded from the ways of her family. She lived with a paternal aunt in her childhood, and did not enjoy the same training as the others. She has good natural abilities, but she does not cultivate them in the right way, and is by no means as strictly methodical as I could wish. Nevertheless, with all the responsibility of my position, I find time to carry on the studies in which my soul has always delighted. And I am sure this has a beneficial effect on my household. It gives me an influence over it socially. Dr. Gessler shares our table, and we do not waste our intervals of intercourse in vulgar chit-chat. We have something to say worth saying. The house

becomes, not a mere inn for the body, but a spiritual temple."

It gave me a feeling of disgust and shame to remember poor Mrs. Summers's shabby parlour, and our merry boyish nonsense, and most particularly my own lurking interest in muffins and Welsh rare-bits.

From that evening I was always on speaking terms with the Blacks, or rather with the mother, for if Mr. Stephen spoke of me, he certainly did not speak much to me. My mind at that time was wide awake to the necessity for its own improvement, and their society was as interesting to me as is an agricultural implement-shop to an enterprising young emigrant farmer.

It ended in my timidly inquiring if Mrs. Black ever received a boarder on such moderate terms as it was within my power to offer; for I was so tired of the rough-and-ready ways of my hired home—so sure that there were incalculable benefits to be derived from living in an atmosphere saturated with intellect, and a household that worked by system.

Mrs. Black received my inquiry with civil attention, but demurred a little before she answered. "There were such numerous advantages connected with her establishment," she said. "It was really

worth something to enjoy them. Refined society was worth something. Intelligent domestic supervision was worth a great deal. And she had just incurred great expense in putting up a new mantel in the parlour—a mantel which had actually gained a first prize at an Art-Exhibition! It was worth something to have the privilege of living among such appointments.” And there she dropped the subject, and began talking about something else.

I went home to Calvert Terrace in a highly dissatisfied state of mind. It could boast nothing that could be called “appointments.” It seemed to me as if the old-fashioned common wooden mantel-shelf destroyed my best relish for my books. I felt as if I was cheated out of my chance of becoming cultivated and refined! I spoke sharply to poor Biddy, and probably she reported it to Mrs. Summers, and that it was in some motherly consideration of possible weariness, or ill-health, that a rice pudding was sent in for my supper. But I sullenly sent it down again, saying to myself that it was food for my higher nature which I wanted.

To my astonishment and delight the next time I met Mrs. Black she herself reverted to my question. They could receive me, she said. They had talked over the matter among themselves, and had resolved

to stretch a point for the sake of a fellow-student. She was sure I would give no trouble, that I would fall into their ways quite easily, without any restiveness or non-appreciation. And on the strength of this conviction she would consent to receive me on my own terms.

I went home with her that evening to take a survey of the chamber that could be at my service. The hall and staircase were trim and spacious, the bedroom looked neat, and the parlour mantel-piece was certainly very fine. I think I forgot that I was not surveying an uninhabited house, for it never occurred to me to wonder that there was no fire in the grate, though it was the middle of a damp and chill October. I closed with the chance with delighted gratitude, and returned to my lodgings in a state of dignified elation, bidding the servant inform Mrs. Summers that I should be glad of a few words in private with her, whenever she had a spare moment.

I went into the parlour to await her. The cheery little fire struck upon me genially, but its blaze only showed the scrubby old-fashioned horse-hair chairs, and the homely tailors'-clipping rug, which Mrs. Summers had made expressly for me a year or two before, when, after a slight illness, I had suffered a

good deal from cold feet. Somehow that rug gave me a sort of meek reproach, but I silenced it with a reflection that though it was very sweet of me to have a sentimental clinging to kindly old associations, yet I must tear it away. It was my positive duty. The involuntary regret only gave my voluntary change a halo of sacrifice and pain—I was immolating my weaker nature on the altar of Higher Progress.

Mrs. Summers came in, plump and cheerful, with an honest broad apron tied about her, and a great liberal collar round her neck.

“Mrs. Summers,” I said, very precisely, “I am quite as sorry as you can be for what I am about to do. I am going to give you notice to quit.”

“You don’t say so!” she exclaimed, aghast. “There isn’t anything the matter, is there—you ain’t leaving London?”

“No, no,” I said, a little taken aback, “I am only leaving here. It was a very nice comfortable home for me when I was quite a young lad, and I’m sure you’ve been very kind and good to me, Mrs. Summers, and I shall always remember it. But I want something more nowadays.”

“I’m sure I’ll always do anything I can, sir,” said the good woman, who did not seem in the least to

understand that the thing was settled. "I know things are a bit hap-hazard at times—used to be, in particular, when I had only those bits of gals from the charity school to help me. Biddy's better, she's clean as a new pin, and don't think it kills her to move herself quick. I know she wants teaching, but she's willin'; she's even always a-trying to practise what you tell her about the fires," she added, with a twinkle in her eyes. "I only wish I could afford a thorough servant—it doesn't take much more—the difference is all in the wages, for them growing girls that doesn't know their work eats as much and more as a settled woman that does. But little as it is, it's more than I can do with what I am taking at present. I've often wished to mention it to you, sir, knowing that young gentlemen that are getting on in the world likes to feel so. But it didn't seem to be my place to begin speaking of it."

"You mean that if I paid a little more, you could improve matters," I said, feeling then within myself that eighteen shillings weekly were not much for a bed, use of sitting-room, board, except dinners, and whole board on Sundays.

"If you and Mr. Giles" (that was the name of the other boarder) "was agreeable to pay me a pound a week each, you shouldn't know the place in



no time. I couldn't ask any rise from the third young gentleman—he's only a little fellow, "and always wanting the doctor."

For a moment my conscience smote me. I was to pay Mrs. Black six-and-twenty shillings weekly. But I speedily remembered that poor Mrs. Summers's improvements did not mean prize marbles, nor Professor Gessler, nor intellectual society.

"That would be four shillings extra, you see," said Mrs. Summers, eagerly, while I paused. "I pay Biddy seven pounds a year. For twelve or fourteen I'd get a real good servant, that had lived in families, and was up to the new-fashioned genteel ways. And knowing it would come back again, I'd venture to lay out a pound or two on the place. The passage wants new cloth, and these chairs would look a great deal better with a bit of fresh chintz, and I know well there's many another way where I could spend five shillings with advantage. If you'd say you'd consider of it, sir."

"I'm sorry you never mentioned this before," I said, impulsively, but remembered my new aspirations and added—"yet I don't think, under the circumstances, it would have induced me to stay; but it is no use raising that question now, for I have just taken lodgings that offer unusual advantages."

"You've really taken them, sir?" said the good woman wistfully: "Well, I'm downright sorry. I'm sure I've tried to do my very best for you, and I've grown to like you, quite natural-like. The place'll seem strange without you, sir. I'd somehow took a notion that you'd stay. I s'pose it was because I wished to keep you. I like what I'm accustomed to. You needn't keep polishing the tins that are in use. New people seem to me like new pots, your hand don't fit 'em readily. It always seems to me that it's easiest to make the best of what you've got. I'd have been only too glad to have a chance to make my place nicer. I've done the very best I could. But it's the way of the world to think that if you make good brown bread, you'll not understand fancy cakes, so they give their white flour and groceries to some other body, as my grandfather, who was a baker in Dumfries, used to say. I'm real sorry to lose you, Mr. Garrett."

"You can't get a less profitable lodger, Mrs. Summers," I said, touched into sincere humility.

"Profit's not only in the pay," she answered, sententiously, "it's in the wear and tear, and the ways and manners, and I don't like changes. I'm real sorry."

I felt so too, somehow.

Next week I drove with my boxes to Desmond Street, Bloomsbury. I wonder if it will be vain in me to record that both Mrs. Summers and Biddy shed some tears over my departure. It *was* unpleasant to go away—no mistake about it. And besides, my fellow-lodger Giles, having heard of our landlady's suggestions, had declared himself quite willing to pay a guinea a week, and in consequence there was a carpenter nailing down the new hall-cloth, even while my boxes were being carried out.

"Let me make you a cup of tea before you go, sir," Mrs. Summers had pleaded; "it's only half an hour before the regular time, and the kettle'll boil in a minute." But I had put aside her kindly invitation with the thought that I should be almost in time for that meal in Desmond Street, and that it would be a social opportunity to become acquainted with my new house-mates. But the drive to Desmond Street took a little longer than I had anticipated, and though Mrs. Black received me with great politeness, she never asked if I needed any refreshment, and there was no trace of a meal in the parlour.

"Our breakfast-hour is half-past eight," she said. "Of course, you do not eat suppers. The Professor never does. We never do. Of course you make

yourself quite free of the parlour, whether anybody else is there or not."

This permission made me feel as if what I had thought a right was only a privilege after all, and must be delicately handled.

"I am going to class this evening," she said; "but if you wish to inquire anything, the servant will call Miss Black—my daughter Mary. She is sure to remain at home. She always does. It is really wonderful to me that a daughter of mine should prefer to spend her whole time in pottering about domestic work, without any necessity. I do wish she would view life in a higher light."

After making some slight arrangement of my possessions, I ventured down-stairs. The parlour-door stood invitingly open, and there was a well-filled book-case at either side of the fire-place, and going up to them I ran my eye along rows of the works of Neander, Strauss, Kant, Bolingbroke, and Chesterfield, varied with ponderous treatises on physiology and logic. I did not think of opening the case till my eye caught a Tauchnitz edition of one of Auerbach's tales, tucked away in a corner. I knew him only by his inimitable "Step-Mother," which Mrs. Summers had bought second-hand on one idle summer evening, cried over, and recommended to

my notice as "sweetly pretty." But I found the book-case was locked.

It was then I first noticed that I was shivering, and looking at the grate, saw that the summer brightness of its steel had never yet been smirched. There was really nothing to do but shiver, for admiring the classic supporters of the prize mantel was not a long absorbing or highly exciting occupation.

It was quite an hour before anybody stirred in the house. Then some one came stepping down-stairs and into the parlour.

"Mr. Garrett, I presume," said this somebody. "I am Mary Black." I rose and bowed, and sat down, and rose again in my hobbledehoy awkwardness, but she went straight to the great arm-chair that stood beside the chilly hearth, and seated herself in it directly opposite to me.

She could not have been more than six or seven years older than me, and she was wonderfully slight and girlish in look. But, somehow, I almost instantly felt with her as I have felt with very old people, when genial and wise. It is a consciousness of a kindly, helpful presence, that looks down at one and laughs, as we may to a child at our knee, and with as little contempt and as much tenderness.

She had a round cheerful face, with just slight

marks, like fine carving, about the cheeks. She had dark hair, plaited up in a trim, tight fashion, a mouth with upward curves at the corners, and deep-set, strong-looking eyes. I did not notice her dress. I never afterwards noticed Mary Black's dress—I would be inclined to say that it was ever the same. I know there were always little ruffles round her throat.

She made a few conventional observations. And then she asked, suddenly—

“Aren't you cold here, Mr. Garrett?”

“Rather,” I admitted. “Have you not begun fires yet?”

“We never begin fires till the first of November,” she answered, looking straight at me. “Never, on any account. Nor continue them after the first of March.” I could not quite understand the curves that played about her mouth.

“It's not so bad in the day-time, you know,” she went on quite gravely, “and there's seldom anybody at home in the evenings except me.”

“And don't you mind it?” I inquired.

“I go and sit in the kitchen,” she said. “I am going there now. There's a beautiful fire on. Wouldn't you like something to eat, Mr. Garrett?”

I was too hungry and too truthful to say "no," so I answered—

"Mrs. Black says nobody here takes supper."

"I am going to cut some bread-and-butter for myself," she said; "will you have some or will you not?"

"Well, thank you, I shall be very glad," I admitted.

"We may as well both go down-stairs," she said, and as I prepared to obey, I inquired, "Is the Professor from home every evening?"

"Oh dear no," she answered; "he is at home at least three evenings out of each week. He's at home to-night—he's down in the kitchen too." And in all the gravity of her watchful eyes there was a twinkle that quite disconcerted me. "You will like the Professor," she added. "I do."

"Eh, Mees Mary, I thought I was never to see you to-night," said a cheerful cracked voice from behind the clothes-screen, as we entered. "How is it that I am to get my verbs and my theorems out of my mind, if I am to be left to myself wid them still valking roond my poor head like de ghost in de empty mansion? De fraulein wid de duster and de darning needle will soon drive dem away."

"I have brought somebody else with me to-night,

Professor," said Mary, in her bright composed tones. "This is our new inmate, Mr. Edward Garrett."

"I am glad to see the young gentlemen," and a great yellow towzled head peered for a moment over the hanging linen, and then disappeared again. "Pardon me for going out of sight, Mr. Edward Garrett. I must be warm, and de garments must be aired, so we must just do as best we can."

"There's a great deal in that!" said Mary, putting down two or three willow-pattern plates, and bidding Lucy, the little serving-girl, to go and fetch some eatables from the pantry.

"Lucy is a wonderful girl," said the unseen professor while the hand-maid disappeared. "I like to hear her talk. It is a new world to me. When Lucy gets a new idea, she hangs it up on her dresser pegs, or puts it away in the kitchen drawer. She translate it into her own vernacular and make it all her own. Dat is the grand way. It is the same wid the language of nations. The literal translation make the nonsense. You must get at the catholic root of the truth, and let it bear its flowers as the different airs shall colour them. It is the soul that you want, not the poor decaying crust of a body. Lucy does not try to understand my poor silly fine



words, and as I am too ignorant to know her vernacular, she suggests it to me, and it is easier for me to understand her than for her to understand me. We were talking but now about the Roman Catholics, and the Friends, and the good Churchmen that are joining together to feed and clothe the hungry children of that dread East-end of London, and I said, 'Lucy, all sects should be but as the many-coloured rays in the prism blending into the pure white crystal of charity.' Says Lucy, 'Ain't it, just like the stuff you mixes into pie-crust? None of them's much 'count till they're mixed, and if they don't mix you know they's bad.' Lucy is a wonderful girl, Mr. Garrett. Study the Lucys. They have not been enough to school to know how to hide themselves. When you get hold of one learned man, he is only worth just what of the Lucys is left in him. If there's much left then he's all the better for his learning."

I went to my bed delighted with the Professor. I had not such an undivided opinion about Miss Mary. I could not help feeling attracted to her, but I had an undefined idea that she was laughing at me. In the course of a few days the uncomfortable personal sensation wore away, and I became aware that her soul was always full of that long,

silent laughter which is the essence of unshed tears.

Next day I was introduced to Miss Joanna, who was but a young female edition of her brother Stephen, and who founded me almost instantly by inquiring what I thought was the right position for the torso of the Venus of Milo. Breakfast was the only meal where the whole household ever gathered. During it, Stephen read aloud the political leader in the daily paper, and Mrs. Black made her comments thereon. Mary seldom sat at the table for five minutes together, very frequently did not appear till the meal was half over, though I knew that she had been up and stirring about the house from a very early hour. The Professor spoke but little at these seasons. If I could have thought it possible, I should have said that he was overawed by Mrs. Black, and I formed a pretty shrewd idea that he did not like Stephen or Joanna.

I did not know how dinner was managed, as I was not often at home then, but tea was frightfully punctual. Both the Professor and I had a constant scramble to be in time, as our work verged close upon this hour, and we were often liable to be somewhat detained by duties beyond our own control. The Professor was frequently late, and either went with-

out the meal, or took it somewhere else; where I could scarcely divine, but it certainly was not in the parlour.

"It is better that anybody should suffer, rather than order and punctuality," Mrs. Black would say, as she ruthlessly directed that the table should be cleared, and eschewed all compromise of "teapot-cosy," or "fender-footman."

I thought it was very fine at first, even when I myself suffered under it. But by-and-by, I found that I felt myself aggrieved whenever I was required to remain half an hour later to do an extra turn of work, or to assist a fellow-clerk.

"I'm afraid you're not so obliging as you used to be, Garrett," Mr. Lambert once mildly hinted, overhearing some muttered grudge on my part.

"I don't find anybody very obliging to me, sir," I answered, with a bitterness that must have been half insolent.

"Don't you, my boy?" and he looked at me with kindly curiosity; "perhaps it is because you look for it from the wrong people."

I was astonished to find that Mr. Stephen went to no office, but spent his days in transferring notes from one manuscript book to another, or in dreamily reading, with a huge encyclopædia at hand for con-

stant reference. Perhaps Mrs. Black thought these leisurely studies might bewilder me, and sought to enlighten me concerning them; for certainly I was never with her many moments before she began to speak to me of her son, his wonderful genius, and the many battles she had fought in its defence.

"Stephen is not made for the petty details of vulgar life," she said. "He has a contemplative soul, and a positive thirst for knowledge. Few people can understand these things, but, nevertheless, unfortunately, they will interfere with them. My late dear Mr. Black, I am sorry to say, had lost a great deal through lack of culture—in fact, my poor Mary takes after him. But he would never have interfered with me in the training of our children. I do not think he would. But his brothers were less sensitive and considerate. They were a sore trial to me in the early days of my widowhood. They were both vulgar men; just a hop merchant and a parish doctor—coarse men with no souls above their places. They always came with the parrot-cry, "What was I going to do with my boy?" They were always wondering why he did not get more prizes, quite unable to see that prizes are generally won by a mere coarse readiness,

and a slavish industry. My dear boy was ever reaching far beyond his mere lessons. Then when he did not seem to care for a bustling out-door life, one of them actually suggested that he should be apprenticed to a watchmaker! His soaring delicate mind cramped to a common mechanical trade! I would not hear of it. Since then, they have wanted him to become a teacher in some boarding or grammar-school. Never, whilst I can prevent it, shall my darling son be doomed to such uncongenial toil. I can make sacrifices in the present for the future. I can bear with hardship now, in the strength of the proud day when Stephen, having achieved some great work, shall come to me and say, 'Mother, you made this possible for me.' Ah, Mr. Garrett, it is a solemn and an awful thing to be the mother of a great soul. How few women are worthy of such honour! How few women would give Joanna opportunity to study art in a pure and lofty sense, instead of wasting her genius in paltry attempts to illustrate insignificant periodicals, spoiling her taste and exhausting her imagination for no reward beyond a few sordid pence."

Mary had entered the room during this harangue, and had caught the last few words. "But, mother," she said, very quietly and seriously (she

was solemnly serious at times, like a river that runs strong and deep beneath its sunny ripples)—“but, mother, don’t you think that real work is the best teacher after all?”

“Yes, in a poor mechanical way, and with certain hard, pushing natures,” said Mrs. Black coldly; “but it is no use your arguing with me on this matter, Mary, for we differ so widely that the most I can hope is, that we are talking about different things. You are sadly too positive and dogmatic, Mary; I fear you are deficient in reverence. You may have a restless strength of your own, but the secret of grand strength is repose, which you lack.”

Mary made no answer, but stood still for a moment, and looked from the window, gazing blankly on the dull houses opposite. The better I became acquainted with her, the more it seemed to me as if her bloom and youthfulness were but a mask, which slipped aside now and then, and showed the work-worn, weary face of a struggling defeated soul. There was at times, too, a flitting shade of defiance—an opening of the lips, as in some appealing cry; but this always passed, and generally broke into a smile as sweet as sunshine through a rifted cloud.

It puzzled me sometimes to know whence the Blacks derived their income. They had no boarders but the Professor and me, and Mrs. Black often spoke as if the means of her early widowhood had been painfully narrow and uncertain. I could not understand how they had since increased, since the "training" of Stephen and Joanna had hitherto absorbed their whole lives, as it bade fair to do till the end. Mary certainly found enough to do in the house; one could not wonder that she always managed to escape for two or three hours' rest or recreation in that chilly, half-furnished chamber of hers, of which I had occasionally caught a glimpse through its half-opened door. Not that she ever secured these undisturbed. Lucy would follow her there to try to find some elasticity in Mrs. Black's hard-and-fast rules. Stephen and Joanna rapped at her door as often as they missed any article they themselves had mislaid through assigning it to some new "proper" place which they could not remember; and Mrs. Black herself often called her out, especially when she was making up her housekeeping-book. People who least endure disturbance often give most. I only wondered why Mary Black stayed so patiently in a home where she was not loved, and where her ceaseless labour was first

eagerly demanded, and then accepted as a proof of her mental and moral inferiority. Cold and stern and unloving as the outer world may be, it seemed to me that she would soon win from it a warmer welcome and a truer appreciation than she could ever find in the home in Desmond Street. It was but the strangers and hirelings there who understood or loved her.

We had no family prayers. We never said grace. As a household we regularly attended no divine service. Our neighbourhood possessed clergymen and ministers of nearly every shade of orthodox belief and natural gift; but Mrs. Black shook her head over them, and pronounced "that they were in darkness—behind the age—poor blind leaders of the blind." She preferred an irregular, erratic attendance on those wandering stars of the pulpit who, when they like and where they like, preach their own little dogmas of doubt and sentiment; men who can understand no faith that is not faith in themselves, and who dare to hope by their farthing candle to illumine those depths which God's own sunshine is not meant to enlighten till the rocks fall and the mountains are brought low. Strange that the mortal who cannot believe in the healing power of the sparkling Jordan will often



willingly go down to the muddiest creek of Abana and Pharpar!

Joanna always accompanied her mother to these services. Stephen did not. He was even beyond their liberality. But I was in no danger of theological discussion with him, for he affected to smile down with supreme superiority upon all who did not subscribe to his creed of "I believe in nothing"—in his infidelity more dogmatic than the most bigoted Romish priest or narrowest sectarian. Professor Gessler attended nowhere, except that he went once or twice to the old German Lutheran chapel, rather from a kindly sentiment towards fatherland than any devout feeling.

I am thankful to say that though Mrs. Black's social and domestic theories had cast their spell over my inexperienced mind, it stopped short there. I was not ready again to venture on the morass of doubt and speculation; nay, wherever I detected its treacherous soil I could not help feeling suspicious of all crops that grew thereon. Therefore I did not falter in my habits of church-going, and brought down my own old-fashioned Sunday books. And there was one to keep me in countenance under Stephen's quiet sneers, and his mother's indulgent prophecies that I should become wider-minded some

day. I might almost say there were two, for even in Mrs. Black's presence Professor Gessler ventured to say that humanity would be in a poor way if it was only to believe what it saw, especially as those who preached that tenet were generally very short-sighted. But, as the Professor's own practice was not on my side, he was but a poor ally; and it was Mary Black who was my genuine stronghold and supporter.

Not that she said much on the subject. In fact, Mary Black talked but little, except sometimes of an evening when the other Blacks were out, and the Professor was smoking his pipe, while she was perched like a little sparrow on the edge of the fender, for Mary Black was fond of low seats. All the intellectual conversation I ever heard in that house was at those evening firesides; very often the kitchen fireside, for even in the depth of winter Mrs. Black had a habit of announcing that there was an excellent lecture to be delivered here or there, and then letting out the parlour fire on the strength of the conclusion that we would all go to hear it. I did not call it intellectual conversation to entertain the family circle with the programmes of classes and athenæums, or the dant phrases of art connoisseurs or scientific smatterers, as was the

custom of Mrs. Black and Joanna. It seemed very fine and learned at first, but after a very few days I found as little originality in it as in a parrot's cry of "What's o'clock?" It was something far different at our little evening gathering. The Professor had known many people, and mingled in many events, and he hit off their salient points with quaint German precision and insight. Mary held her own brightly and well in these conversations, always in a happy harmony with her old friend, but with a curious suggestion of a something beyond him in her own soul, which raised the young girl above the grey-haired man, and often, it seemed to me, made him turn towards her with a pitiful yearning as towards a secret almost within his grasp, and yet withheld.

Mary Black was faithful in her attendance at divine worship. She went to a little chapel near at hand, where a lowly, good man preached to a poor, simple congregation. It was the very plainest spiritual food that was offered there. I thought it was rather below her, and once ventured to say so. She only shook her head, and said gently—

"It suits me best, just now."

And Sabbath after Sabbath she brought out her calf-bound, red-leaved edition of Jeremy Taylor's

“Holy Living and Dying.” She never wearied of him. The good old bishop would have counted her fellow-worshippers as pragmatical schismatics, and they would probably have condemned him as a mere minion of a hateful hierarchy. But they each had something good for her. What in both was catholic and everlasting she took to her own heart—what in either was merely local and temporary fluttered harmlessly away, like a paper kite from its entanglement among the sturdy branches of a good old oak. Joanna tossed her head at her sister’s “illogical inconsistency.” Mrs. Black bewailed it as resulting from a want of “severe mental training.” But it seemed to me as if Mary had already the true secret of that universal church and brotherhood of which the others often talked so grandly and so vaguely.

Regularly coming in and going out to her set services, whilst the other women of the house were wandering at all hours to all distances, Mary became naturally the presiding spirit of the Sabbath-day. Not that she ever altered her mother’s regulations. She accepted it as her duty to submit and supplement, not to disobey. Now it was Mrs. Black’s way to waive punctuality on the Sabbath. Her laws might circumscribe duty, and fight with necessity, but inclination was to be absolved. When you were

free to obey, then you need not. Perhaps the easiest solution may be that on week-days it suited her to be punctual, and on Sundays it did not. Much philosophy can be best explained by reference to the philosopher's practice.

But with gentle tact Mary so managed the meals that her family's irregularity should not interfere with anybody who wished to be punctual. Stephen, who spent his Sundays dawdling about at home, generally sat down with his sister, the Professor, and me. It dawned upon me, by-and-by, that Stephen was an unusually weak man, and that he might be much more sociable if he had power to push back the character of lofty, contemplative genius which his mother had forced upon him; and presently, I wondered whether at first his infidelity had been more than the querulousness of an idle and unhealthy boy, only so readily and almost proudly accepted as another proof of the untrammelled flight of his intellect, that it had grown upon him hard and strong, like a rock enclosing a helpless frog; and at last I came to the conclusion that poor Stephen Black was little more than an idiot, and differed from other men in an inverse ratio to what his mother's vanity concluded.

And really, when Mrs. Black and Joanna did not

bustle in by the middle of the meal, we often had very pleasant times. Mary never expressly "talked religion," but I rather think she never talked anything else. You don't want to be told of the sunshine when it is in the room. There it is, in its purity and brightness and warmth, saying more for itself than you can say. She always brought forward topics that suited the Professor; and presently, just at the right point, she would appeal to Stephen for some date or reference, and make him interested in the talk, because necessary to it. And over all she shed that soft, nameless influence of hers, like some sweet flower in a squalid court, bearing silent witness of its home in sunny fields and scented gardens far away.

I noticed that there was always some bright attractive book left lying among the scientific or sceptical literature that the other Blacks brought out for their leisure hours. It might be but the translation of some Greek or Latin hymns, whose antiquity or debatable authorship might interest Stephen. Or it was the "Pilgrim's Progress," which had an undying mystical charm for the Professor, whence some divine grace might drop by-and-by, like a loving letter hidden in a bunch of roses.

As time passed on, I began to learn that an

unfeeling and irresponsible routine, planned on purpose to absolve one person from her natural duties, produces about as much order and comfort as an unguided steam-engine running headlong in the public streets. Set dates for certain foods, or household habits, without consideration for the state of the markets or the weather, often produced ludicrous and tantalising results. Cooking on exact principles, with no kindly deviation allowed for natural irregularities in the ingredients, was frequently repulsive. Domestic work, that was never to be done out of its appointed season, however sorely accident required it, left the house often in a highly unsatisfactory state. Mary threw herself into the gaps as gallantly as she could, but nobody can fight an iron machine, though it may be somewhat turned aside; and I cannot venture to say what the house would have become without one intelligent and thoughtful woman, who was willing "to waste herself on trivial duties" of caring for the health and comfort of others, and making it possible for them to keep their tempers and live in cleanly, godly fashion. Mrs. Black's logic never brought her to the question what would happen if every woman thought it nobler to be a school-child than a house-mother, and aspired to lay her hands on the encyclopædia and the dictionary

rather than the spindle and the distaff. I wonder what she thought was the aim and end of all knowledge?

I felt foolish enough whenever I visited my fellow-clerk, Mr. Giles, who still lived in Mrs. Summers's house. That good woman, having presently filled my vacant place with a gentleman who was willing to pay what she thought liberal terms, though something considerably less than I was giving Mrs. Black, had set about the work of repair and improvement with all promptitude and zest. The bright new hall-cloth that met my eyes the moment I entered the door was but a small matter. Who shall tell the glories of the neat drugget and tasty chintz in the parlour? Where were the old willow plates, and the coarse-blown glass? Happily supplanted by gay-rimmed white china, and good plain cut. She had set up a plain little book-case in one corner, and she told me its history, delightedly using a quite supererogatory duster all the while. It was the work of a poor young carpenter thrown out of employment by a great failure in a slack season—"a real deserving young fellow," said the good woman, "but not the sort that you can offer a few shillings to—and, in fact, I hadn't them to spare without something for them, being as my gentlemen



was so liberal, and it was my duty to be making things nice for them. But I thought they'd find a case a real comfort for their books, instead of having to hunt down in boxes for 'em, or leaye 'em lying about, messing and dusty. So me and the young man soon came to terms. He named a price that paid him fair and yet was cheap to me. He got regular work the day after he'd finished, and it just saved him from having to pawn everything."

Mrs. Black would have been afraid of interfering with "the fundamental principles of political economy." What should we do with a man who feared to give away a cup of cold water, in case it should disturb the tide of the river? Should we call him a madman or a murderer?

"And you must just look here, too," continued Mrs. Summers, leading me to the other side of the fire-place. "My new lodger, you see, has travelled, and he'd brought home from the Indies those feather fans, and that lovely bit of carving. Well, he set 'em up in his bed-room, and I thought it was a thorough pity they should be hidden there, where nobody ever saw 'em, not even himself, for how can he, when he's asleep? So as there were a few bits left from the wood of the book-case, I told my workman I'd give him a trifle more if he'd knock up

these shelves here, and then I brought down the feathers and the carving, and hunted out two or three pretty bits of my own. That, now, is a real Dresden, sir. It was made for a salt-cellar, and my grandmother had a set of four, but that one is all that's left. And that other's what they call a Chelsea shepherdess—I don't know why, for I don't believe there ever were shepherdesses in Chelsea, but I know it's good, for it belonged to my husband's mother's mistress, and she set great store by it. It does me good to see 'em put out again; I didn't expect I ever should any more. It's quite like old times. And bit by bit, the other young gentlemen have added these trifles. That card model was made by that poor little chap that was always so ailing. Ah! you knew him, Mr. Garrett; he was here in your time. He used to be real weariful often. He couldn't go out ever in the evenings, and he couldn't go much even to business lately, and he couldn't be always reading, poor dear. That's about as wholesome as always eating, I reckon. And I tried to think what could pass his time away a little lighter-like. I remember my old uncle Tom, who lost both his legs in the French wars, taught himself to make all kinds of pretty models with card and paper. It used to be a rare treat to us children to go to see

'em. I'd got one or two, old and yellow, crumpled up somewhere, and I brought them out and showed 'em to the poor boy, and said, 'wouldn't it amuse him to try to do the like?' He laughed, and asked what use was they? But I said anything was better than nothing, and that old uncle Tom said he believed it was the Holy Spirit put him in mind of models, to keep him from swearing at his wooden stumps. So he said no more, but presently took to it, and by-and-by did it so beautiful, that Mr. Giles got him to let him take them and sell 'em at a meeting for the benefit of the Ragged School. After that he made more, and gave them to a little bricklayer-boy, who had an accident to his right hand, and he took them round to genteel sort of neighbourhoods to sell, and it was as good as a living to that child all the winter, till he was fit for his bricks again. But my poor dear young gentleman had happened to hear that I took a fancy to that model of St. Giles Church, being as it was my old parish, and he'd done it from a picture I'd lent him. He'd never sell it, and when he was going away he gave it to me. 'It'll be something to remember me by,' says he. And though he said not another word, and I might take t he meant now he was away, yet I know as well as could be he was thinking of a longer journey than to

his own home. He promised he'd let me know how he was going on, for he's downright ill now. He only went away last week."

"And I suppose there's nobody come in his place yet?" I asked, as nonchalantly as possible, but with a pit-a-pat of anxious hope in my heart, which stopped heavily as Mrs. Summers replied—

"O yes, sir, I've been so fortunate as to get that clever young minister at the Independent chapel. I'd never have charged that poor dear boy more while he stayed, but of course I proposed the new rates to the new-comer, and he says he's well satisfied. The three gentlemen hit it off very well together. They're all as different as can be, but as they don't each think himself everybody, they chime in fine, and as Mr. Giles said yesterday, it takes more than one note to make a tune. And Biddy——"

"What! You still have Biddy?" I said. "I thought you were going to get rid of her."

"Well, sir," Mrs. Summers explained, apologetically, "my object was to get the work done well—better than it had been. I always liked Biddy; she moves herself quick, and don't turn round nasty when you tell her of a thing. She'd only been with me six months when I made my changes, and it

would have gone against the girl if I'd turned her off with that short character. So I spoke serious to Biddy. I told her I'd have in a real good char-woman once a week to do the roughest work, and then if I saw she could make up her mind to be quiet and careful in her ways, and willing to attend to whatever I told her, I would make it worth her while, and into the bargain, she'd be fitting herself for a better place still, when she should leave mine. I think we're always bound to make the best of those we've got, and to do our best for 'em," said Mrs. Summers, whose sweet simple nature had so utterly forgotten any pain at my leaving, that she administered this rebuke all unconsciously. "We know the worst of what we have, and we don't know the worst of what we haven't. It's better to mend an old bridge than to pass it by, in hope of finding another. Leastways, it's my way, and it generally answers."

Just after that visit to Mrs. Summers, we had some very bad weather. Though it was July, there were constantly recurring heavy rains and a perpetual damp mist in the air. I was very busy in the counting-house at that time, and scarcely noticed how frightfully comfortless the house was, for Mary Black had been called from home by the illness of

the paternal aunt who had brought her up. When I say I did not notice, I mean that I simply felt no inclination for the dank salads and sickly plums that appeared in "their proper season" at our repasts, but ate them because I was hungry,—that I shivered in my bed (in a room whose walls were moist through Mrs. Black's principles of "proper ventilation" at all hours of day and night), but went to sleep because I was so weary. Only at last I had no appetite at all, but emptied my water-bottle at a draught, and only closed my eyes to dream over again every torment or terror of my whole life.

I remember little after one morning when they told me at the office that I had better not stay any longer, but go home and go to bed. Mrs. Black was out when I returned, she and Stephen had gone with the Association on its archæological excursion to some castle in Sussex. It was the Professor's busiest day,—he would not be home till evening. So when I staggered in, there was nobody to receive me but poor little frightened Lucy, who instantly volunteered to make me some lemonade. As I lay pressing my hot forehead to my damp pillow, I heard Miss Joanna come in from some of her classes, and when Lucy told her of my predicament, she said, "Indeed!"—and then told Lucy to go and buy her some Indian

ink. I remember laughing feverishly to myself at a fitful recollection that she was studying a picture of "A Ministering Angel," and had spoken most enthusiastically of "the tender feeling" of the chief figure. At two o'clock poor Lucy roused me from a heavy doze to say that "dinner was on the table," and as the instant I sat up I felt my head too heavy to support, I fell back and told her I could not come, and was dozing off again when she once more knocked at the door to say that "Miss Joanna wanted to know if I would have dinner sent up to me?" I asked what there was for dinner, and Lucy answered, "only German sausage and potatoes, as missus was out," and I said, "Never mind, I don't want any."

I dozed through the day on my bed, but was sitting up when Mrs. Black came home in the twilight. She knocked at my door, and I opened it to her. She still had on her bonnet, and carried a large bouquet in her hand. Somehow, I felt an unaccountable longing towards some scarlet geraniums composing it.

"I'm sorry you have been unwell, Mr. Garrett," she said; "but such a nice long rest as you have had must have done you good. Silence and abstinence are the very best regimen for you. Of course

they bring one down, so that you don't feel quite yourself yet. Oh, we have had such a delightful day. It was so interesting to make out the carving on the walls of the old guard-house. We actually made out the soldiers' old accounts of money and food. Such a treat! Are not these lovely flowers? I am going to set them up in dear Joanna's room. We must give beauty to those who love the beautiful, mustn't we? You will hear all our archaeological news if you come down to supper. You don't feel quite equal to it, eh? Well, let it be as you like; only to anybody who cares for these things it would be the very best medicine. Good night."

And I was left alone in the dusk. Poor me! I had a sick thought of home—a forlorn, helpless yearning for good Mrs. Summers, with her delicate mutton broth and comforting gruels, and her own wealth of helpfulness and good cheer which always made being sick the very best thing to being well. But there was nothing for me but to lie down and forget myself as soon as I could.

I suppose I was called as usual next morning. I know I did not respond. I believe Professor Gessler paid me a visit, and insisted that a doctor should be sent for. During the day I was inquired for from the counting-house. I heard all this afterwards.



I know no more of myself for some time after that. I do not know when I slept, or when I waked. I had one curious dream of Mary Black, in a mourning dress, weeping bitterly. It must have been only a dream, for her good old aunt's sickness was unto death, and Mary was never able to return to Desmond Street during my illness. My attendants must have dropped some word before me, which produced this reflection on my poor distorted mind. I remember watching the flies, and thinking that they paid no rent for their house-room.

And then I suddenly awoke in an old-fashioned, raftered chamber, and instead of feeling strange, joyfully felt myself at home in Mrs. Sumners's own apartment in the old house at Calvert Terrace. Then somebody stepped to my bedside with a gratefully steaming cup of tea. It was my sister Ruth.

I was in no mood for explanations then. And I distinctly remember that I was not at all astonished. It is one of the strange attributes of that mysterious spiritual elevation and peace which generally follows the fierce rending of the physical frame, that it readily accepts harmonious change without the discord of inquiry. This often makes me wonder whether we do not raise a needless trouble when we

restlessly inquire concerning the details of our surroundings in the Better Land. After the final wrench of Death, shall not our souls rise pure and humble, wise enough to find God's will their own, with no more need of prayer to make it so?

I was content to learn gradually how it all came to pass. I never received any set history of my lost days, but simply gathered, from time to time, that Mrs. Black had promoted some stray poor woman to be my nurse, in the assured conviction that she would do well enough under such sensible and superior superintendence as her own. It was an absurd fallacy in her eyes that an invalid had right to claim the exclusive attention of anybody but a very common and inferior person. I got worse and worse, and still no message was sent home. Even Mary Black, whose aunt died just at that time, had no idea of my illness. How it would have ended I do not know, but my fellow-clerk and old housemate, Mr. Giles, in making inquiries after me, happened at last to encounter the Professor, who at once raised his alarms about my state, and his suspicions as to my treatment. Giles wrote off to my home at Mallowe instantly, and of course, when he got home to Calvert Terrace, told Mrs. Summers the whole story. At least forty-eight hours must elapse before

my family could respond to the summons, and Mrs. Summers said promptly that Death travelled quicker than posts or coaches, and something must be done at once. If my fever was infectious, she would, on the strength of her old acquaintance, defy Mrs. Black, and instal herself at my bedside till she saw me in the hands of "my people." If it was not, and the doctor would allow me to be moved, she would bring me away to her own place at once. She and Giles (dear old Giles, whom I had often despised as a mere rattle!) rushed off to the doctor, got his assurance and sanction, accompanied with sundry shrugs of the shoulder to convey his opinion of Mrs. Black, and then repaired to Desmond Street and bore me off in triumph to Calver's Terrace, where Ruth found me in the course of the following day.

Ruth is a model nurse. She does not put aside her iron will when she enters a sick room, but she draws over it such a warm silken glove, that it is as pleasant in touch as strong in force. She has power to sit with her hands before her—she, my energetic, industrious sister!—without any restless demonstration of doing nothing. I never even noticed how many patient hours she had passed so, till I was sufficiently recovered for her to allow herself to

resume her favourite stitching. And she has a plain, grave, incidental way of "saying" a hymn, which refreshes one, mind and soul, long before one could bear to be read to.

And so I became convalescent, and presently Giles, and the minister, and the travelled young lodger were permitted to come in one by one, and talk a little to me, and put down new stakes of interest in my ploughed-up life, whereon my returning strength might twine its growing tendrils. By-and-by Professor Gessler came too, on tiptoe, bringing a great bunch of dahlias, which had been sent to him by Mary, still away from home, winding up her aunt's little country household.

"I suppose we shall never have you back again, Mr. Garrett?" he said. "Eh, well," he added, "I must not wish it. It does well enough for me, the old Professor, who can be happy anywhere vid his pipe. The Frau-mamma is a queer woman. She thinks the little school-class is more grand than God's school in the world."

"Yes," said Ruth, who had learned to know the old man in the course of his daily calls of inquiry, "she thinks it is wasting intellect to tend a sick-bed. and using intellect to watch zoophytes."

"She makes her little rules, as if the world was

one machine, and one that never stops or falls out of gear," said the Professor; "but creation is guided by a higher and sweeter order than that."

"Yes," observed Ruth. "Rain does not come on a set day every week, but at the seasons when it does most good."

"Method and order are not the end, but the means," said the Professor.

"Therefore they consist in doing the right work at the right season, instead of the wrong work at a regular hour," responded Ruth.

"True. The Juggernaut car, crushing whatever comes in its way, is no true incarnation of law," the Professor remarked. "But the fact is, Miss Garrett, implements, whether of material tool or moral rule, are not all that is needed for any work."

"No, indeed," said Ruth, "a great work-basket generally means very little work. A genius with an iron nail, and a prison wall, does well; but a self-styled student, with studio, model, and marble does nothing. And he is always so particular about studio, model, and marble, poor fellow!"

"Be it in work of skill or deed of love," observed the Professor, "the secret of success lies in the soul, and not in the tool-box."

"And Providence generally brings the best work

out of hard schools, where the scholars had to find their own books and materials," said Ruth.

"The fact is," answered the Professor, bending forward, as if to whisper a secret, "it is just all vanity in the Frau-mamma Black. It is just the same feeling that in other ladies brings out the wonderfulest out-of-de-way caps and dresses. It is just vanity and de busy idleness, the sort of thing that, when I was a boy, made me choose to learn de Chinese alphabets when I should have been at my Latin roots."

"It is just this, Professor," said my sister, gravely : "an utter forgetting that the chief end of life is to glorify God ; and that unless they contribute to that end, zoology, mathematics, and all learning, have no more intrinsic value than bare A, B, C."

"You have right, you have right," said the Professor thoughtfully. "I see it. When we know that is the chief end we shall be willing to go our nearest way towards it, and we shall see dignity in the kitchen, and honour amongst the dishes and dusters. You have right, Miss Garrett. I see it now. That is the way the Fraulein Mary goes," he added. "That is where her religion meets her life—I see it now."

"Religion is just highest and truest life," said

Ruth; "no excrescence, no mere repair, neatly executed."

And there was a silence till I inquired where and how Mary Black now was.

"She has not returned yet to Desmond Street," the Professor answered, rousing himself from a reverie. "You have heard that the good old aunt is dead. She has left our Fraulein the charge of all her affairs, and also her little property, which will be worth more than a hundred pounds yearly."

"What a good thing for Miss Black!" I said; "now surely she will be quite independent, and not feel herself bound to work so hard for people who despise her for doing it."

The Professor looked at me with a curious twinkle about his face. "The dear Fraulein Mary," said he, "has long been as independent as the angels in heaven, who yet delight to serve poor erring mortals. What do you think she was doing when she went away to her own room and shut the door and stayed there as long as she could? She was keeping up the house over the heads of the students of science and art. She was working at her desk. I cannot tell you what she has written, for the Fraulein Mary keeps that a secret, but I have seen the great big cheques she has earned by it. I have told her she

should not let herself be so interrupted and worried ; but making believe, like an angel, that she did not notice who worried her, she has always said, 'So my mother says—she tells me I do not give myself fair play ; but you are both wrong. I know better. Can I write of life without living ? Are you as cruel as Pharaoh, to bid me make bricks without straw ?' The Fraulein Mary does not want ease—only duty ; and she has, if I may so speak, a kind of divine selfishness, by which she knows that this must be the very best thing for herself as well as for others. She will stand in her lot and make the best of it."

"And high cultivation will bring more out of the poorest soil than will careless farming from the richest," said Ruth. "And though one may throw away what one has, how does one know what one may get ? 'Meddle not with them that are given to change.'"

"I've learned that by experience," said I.

"And nearly paid for it with your life," she answered.

I can finish my story in a few words. Of course, I never returned to Desmond Street, and for years saw none of the Black household, except occasionally Professor Gessler and Mary. From the Professor I



learned that everything continued to go on much in the same old way. Only that I found the Professor gradually fell into good habits of holy Sabbath keeping, and by-and-by, when he was quite an old man, took an infants' class in a Sunday-school, and taught the babes the grand old truths which he had found at last, strong and pure, amid the mists of his learning.

Joanna, after continuing her art-studies with her old fruitless zest till she was thirty, suddenly married a man whom she had only known for a few weeks, and who had neither fortune nor craft to depend on. Her mother was deeply offended—the more so, when Joanna presently sunk into a soured helpless slut, who did not fulfil her new domestic and maternal duties, yet made them an excuse for neglecting every decorum and amenity of life. But good-hearted Mary Black would not allow herself to rejoice in her mother's sudden accession of affection towards herself till she had induced her to pardon Joanna, and to receive her, if not with the old favour, at least with civil tolerance.

Under this disappointment Mrs. Black aged very rapidly, and so gently and imperceptibly did her daughter Mary slip into her place as household head, that the old lady was fain to believe that the sudden

peace and happiness which fell upon the family were really the crowning of her own management!

But poor Stephen had been long sinking into very ill health. His mother said that he had overstrained his mind. The Professor told me that the medical man said he had always been weak and ill-balanced in mind and body, and though the healthy bracing of some active work might have done much for him, it had long been too late for that. And at last Stephen laid aside the note-book and the Encyclopædia. And the old translated hymns, and the "Pilgrim's Progress," and the Bible itself were always ready to his hand. He sunk into a strange somnolent silence, but poor Mary, praying always as she worked, hoped that for once his mother's fond assertion was true, and that his thoughts were still active. But was she to live for years in the dim sunshine of such hope?

There came a sign to her prayer and her wrestling for her brother's salvation—some few words whispered in her ear, and kept in a silence as sacred as her love for the soul whose secret they were; some few little unconscious actions which showed that the idol of self had crumbled away, and revealed that glorious kingdom of Faith and Love which it had obscured so long. And at the very last, when the crude learning

and philosophy of a wasted life lay dead in the numb brain, Stephen's failing fingers groped in the dark for her hand, and held it to the end.

And Mary dried her tears, and felt that she was not comfortless, and could wait till the next world for full satisfaction. Her God was a loving God, and would not demand much where he had given so little.

Mary married at last, when she "was quite an old woman" by her own account. She married a nephew of her dear old Professor Gessler, and they went, with his uncle and her mother, to live at Heidelberg. I went to see her off, surrounded with the tender gallantry of her bridegroom and his kinsman, with the fussily demonstrative attention of her mother, while even Joanna stood on the quay, tearful, with a child at each side and one in her arms. And when I remembered the barren desert in which Mary Black had waited and worked, I took anew to my heart the lesson—" *He that endureth overcomes.*"

#### IV.

#### THE GAIN OF LOSS.

**A**MONG my "experiences," I must tell of some for which others paid the premium. One life can no more illustrate every moral truth, than one man can act in every stirring event of a single year. One life in its ups and downs may know the trial of poverty and the temptation of wealth, the pang of sorrow and the ecstasy of joy, the extremes of degradation and honour—there may be no limit to the tests and changes which may come to it from without; but yet it is set within the borders of its own nature. The wind that withers the tender flower scarcely shakes the giant tree in whose shadow it grows—the lightning which rends the oak in twain, probably leaves the tender flower unscathed. There are aims lurking in human breasts which divide each from his fellows, into almost a different species. Even God's changing grace does not eradicate these differences. In His heavenly

kingdom as in His world of nature, there shall be the lion and the lamb, only there they shall lie down together, the strong and the gentle, with all their ferocity or their weakness taken away for evermore.

We have not to make ourselves. God has made us; but Satan has done his best to spoil us. We must find out as well as we can, what of us is of God. It underlies the other, like some grand old master's painting beneath a repairer's daub. Very likely the repairer has not altered much, only deepened the tints and darkened the lines, and perhaps put in a figure or two, to suit his own coarse taste.

It seems to me that herein lies a great mistake of much attempted good. It is destructive rather than constructive, aggressive rather than defensive. It would catch a lion and clip his mane in sheep-fold fashion, so that he would fain go roaring back to his native forest to hide himself till his glory was grown again. How few modern evangelists would have accepted the fire of Peter, and the timidity of Thomas, just as we accept the green apples and hard buds of spring as the earnest of the golden fruit and glowing flowers of a later season! Though they are forced to admit that most work needs many

kinds of tools to perfect it in every part, yet they seem often bitten by a strange desire not to sharpen the knife and weight the hammer, but to change the knives into hammers. Too often is zeal chilled by suggestions of intemperance, and patience disheartened by imputations of lukewarm indolence. It was not so with Christ. He took men as they were, and made the best of them and not the worst, knowing that hasty Peter could "weep bitterly," and that fearful Thomas, who dared not hope, could dare to die.

When I first entered our firm, a Mr. Swift was a junior partner in it. He scarcely ever came to the counting-house, for although not more than thirty-five years of age, and a man of stalwart build and great animal spirits, he was suffering from some disorder which rendered it dangerous for him frequently to encounter the whirl and excitement of active City life. When he did come, he usually arrived in a cab, from which he stepped leaning on a staff, and passed through the establishment with a separate joke for every individual therein, from the porter up to Mr. Lambert himself. He had a keen eye for business, and a clever head for every detail of the ledgers or correspondence. But he did everything as if it was play, and it was often hard for the

uninitiated to believe in the exactitude and steadfastness of such a merry man. I have often noticed that a few commonplace words from grave, stately Mr. Lambert would inspire full confidence in a customer who had been only rendered more and more doubtful by really clever explanations from Mr. Swift. But we youngsters were always glad to see him, for besides making work like holiday, he was generally the first to find out when any of us would be the better for a real holiday, and to get it for us.

Even these few and far-between visits of his, gradually grew fewer and farther between. Even the cab-journeys were too much for him. Yet the merry mind lived on brightly in the wreck of the sturdy frame, and two or three times a week I was deputed to go to his villa at Canonbury, and take with me sundry of the accounts, and the whole of the South American correspondence, which he, as a good Spanish scholar, invariably answered.

I grew to know him better in these visits. He was a man whose whole nature reveals itself, more or less, in every action, even if it be but the summing of dry columns of figures. But in this world of many shams, his utter frankness kept its secret better than any reserve. For few people can keep

faith to believe that any man is what he seems, and that the good he shows is only a sample, and perhaps not the best, of what is stored in his heart. I learned that Mr. Swift was as popular at home as abroad; that his outer-world gaiety was not purchased by sour tempers and peevishnesses in retirement, and that the bounty and largess he scattered about him was no more the outcome of mere good-nature, than a rich crop is the result of a mere genial season, independent of the soil it springs from. His kindness and liberality might seem random and over-ready in their gushing wealth, but there was a wise providence and thrift underlying them all, so that in their beneficent purposes they failed far more seldom than the cautious charity and tardy alms of colder natures.

In the course of these business visits of mine, which always ended in a snug little supper, he told me all of his history that he remembered. He had travelled much and known many people, and was full of graphic pleasant stories of what he had seen and heard. But over this world of anecdote and experience his landmarks of personal history lay far apart and dim as the latitude lines on the map of the earth. They centred and intensified, at the two poles, as it were, of his life—the home whence



he had started as a boy, and the present home, where he knew with a sure and silent but cheerful knowledge, that he was waiting for Death. He would speak gleefully of himself among the sports and pleasures of his old paternal farm under the Cumberland hills, and again he would tell sly stories of the adventures and misadventures of his courting days, and "scoldings" he got as a husband. But between these two he had little to tell of himself, except that he had gone abroad, and hunted buffaloes and jaguars over the pampas of the Paraguay. He had been "in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the 'sea," but he was not an artist to spoil his picture by painting his own figure larger than the wild bull in the hunt, redder than the flame of the prairie fire, or taller than the mast in the shipwreck. Once or twice, when he narrated rather curtly and coldly some exploit of "a fellow who was there," I fancied that he might have better used the pronoun "I." Only one heroism could we ever lay directly to his charge, which was that, within two days after his landing at Liverpool from America, he had borne a leading part in saving the crew of a coaster wrecked off Northumberland. He could not hide or gainsay that, because when his work was over, he had been carried senseless into

the house of a sea-captain, whose only daughter he had presently married.

Poor Mrs. Swift! She had been the one girl in a household of six boys. Her father had been one of a true race of sea-kings; but he had married, for pure love, the delicate, dainty daughter of a ruined "gentle" West-of-England family, whom he had found hiding away their poverty in a cottage at Tynemouth. Reversing the frequent descent of traits, Tom and Dick, Fred and Harry, Willie and Jem had all "taken after" their hardy father, while the little Lucy alone resembled her weakly mother. She was the last of the tribe, too, like a sweet sprig of jessamine sent at the top of a hamper of big red apples. When she opened her eyes on the world, Tom and Fred were already ship's apprentices, and Dick a middy on a man-of-war. By the time she was sewing her sampler, and learning Mrs. Hemans's poetry, all the brother-birds had taken wing; even little Jem, only two years older than herself, being adopted by her father's childless brother and carried off by him to Canada, to send home a few round-written letters about skating and sleighing, and then be heard of no more, except that an occasional Canadian newspaper or packet of Indian finery made the pitiful protest of natural affection

against the silence of far distance and strange interests.

All the others, like the true-hearted lads they were, had drifted back from time to time to the old home-nest, filling it with strange sailor-ories and good-tempered practical jokes. Sometimes they came with great sea-chests, with costly, sickly-perfumed Eastern trifles stowed in odd corners, and struggling with the fresh salt smell of the garments from the ship's laundry. Sometimes, like the prodigal sons that they were not, they arrived bronzed and battered and torn, with one hand-borne bundle of salvage. But they were not all absolutely sailors. Harry travelled as a supercargo, and often went far inland of the ports where he touched; and Willie was altogether a landsman—a working pupil in a colliery not more than thirty miles from home.

One would have thought that the girl Lucy would have grown up brave-hearted and free-souled in such a breezy atmosphere. But then there were long weary months when she was left alone with her mother. The poor tender woman grew always frailer and more ailing, full of restless fears and darkening superstitions. Dearly as her husband and boys loved her, she perhaps had a jealous sense

that she was not a power in their lives, and revenged herself by the narrow strength of her dominion over Lucy. The delicate girl was not taught to strengthen herself by fresh air and exercise; she was never to meet the east wind, which her father and brothers loved. She was kept from morning till night at her elaborate cooking, and her fine embroidery, and her endless readings of wire-woven essays and tearful poetry. Even her mother's type of religion was fitter for some underground chapel, with candles burning and incense-laden air, than it was for the grey storm-beaten church on the rock where the two went to pray for "all that travel by land or by water." Her piety never mounted into the sunshine of praise on the mountain of faith. Perhaps there were some women who followed our Saviour up the *via dolorosa* and down to Joseph's sepulchre, but who were weeping at home when they might have met their risen Lord in the garden, and watched Him ascend to his throne from the hill of Bethany. Such a one was Lucy's mother.

Less gentle-hearted men than those of their household might have wearied of the endless lamentations over their daring and their dangers, or sickened of the feeble exhortations and morbid rebukings of a narrow devotion that could not believe in their quiet.

manly godliness. But their sweet tempers and calm nerves bore this all unruffled, albeit it could not but set the mother and daughter apart from them, much as the fragile Dresden toys on the mantel were set apart from the honest, useable household china. The poor women themselves were left with an ignorant void aching within them, since the appetite of the daintiest nature cannot be satisfied wholly with moral sugar-plums and pound-cake. And when Fred was killed by a fall from his mast, and Willie was brought home to die a lingering unconscious death from a terrible injury received in his mine, their sister felt, amid all her grief, the dumbness of a remorse that she had let them go away without ever really knowing them.

I dare say she tried to draw nearer to those who remained. But by that time she must have been about twenty-seven, and they were all older; and if they had not made an ideal of woman, out of their own home-experience, at least they had found full satisfaction elsewhere for anything that their fuller natures required. Tom was married, Dick was openly engaged, and even Harry's brief visits home were sadly curtailed by a restless wish to spend a good deal of his leisure in London. It is little use to plough at harvest. But it was just at this time

that George Swift was carried unconscious into the dim home at Tynemouth, there to recover from the penalty of his heroism.

George Swift had never known mother nor sister since he was quite a little boy. Women seemed angels to him; and these had just the gentleness and patience that he had missed in the masculine virtue among which he had lived. They did not chide or lament over him, for he was not their own son, or brother. And in his blank innocence of any possible obstacle, George Swift walked straight into the little castle of Lucy's heart, and actually made it wonder how it would be when he was gone, before he asked to remain as its master for evermore.

They were married then and there. Perhaps it was a vindication of Lucy's kinship to her decided, dashing father and brothers, that she took the crowning step of a woman's life with none of the delay, less than a quarter of the warning, and not half the preparation and doubt that most women demand. At any rate, it caused several of her townswomen, who had laughed at her as a punctilious precise little fool, to change their minds and pronounce her a sly, deep puss. Even her mother had no foreboding or lamentation at the marriage, for

were not George Swift's wandering days over, and was he not going to settle down as a staid, orderly merchant in London city? Lucy's mother put but one minor note into the whole wedding tune, and that was only in plaintive self-pity, as she kissed the bride, and bade her to rejoice "that she would never have to sit listening to the wind, and wondering whether she was really a wife or a widow."

I remember Mrs. Swift from my very first visit to Canonbury. She was quite a unique female figure in my life at that time. For good Mrs. Summers, with all her bountiful humanity, was just a lowly working woman, while Kate Wills, and even Annie Cromer, as the very crown of their innate ladyhood, were often obliged to sacrifice the conveniences of existence for its vitalities. Whereas Mrs. Swift had every lawful right to the soft silk dresses and fine lace that were in such harmony with her quiet manner and delicate fairness. It would have been a sin for Mrs. Wills or Mrs. Cromer to spend hours in pottering about a conservatory, trimming away the first spot of blight, and making all like a fairy-built abode for fairies. It would have been a sin for them to attempt to cultivate stores of china and styles of dress, whose care and elaboration could be trusted to no hireling hand, but must gracefully

occupy the leisure of the lady of the house. But Mrs. Swift had full right to all these things. When I heard her husband playfully exalting his wife's uncommonly superior taste and industry, I used to think that circumstances were hardly fair to others whose taste had to be exerted to make "old clothes look like new," and whose industry was spent to maintain sheer plain cleanliness and common order. And I used to wonder how it was that Mrs. Wills was more blooming, and Mrs. Cromer more vivacious than Mrs. Swift. Also I must own that I preferred the scent from Mrs. Cromer's penny pots of musk to all the dainty odours of Mrs. Swift's *pot-pourri*.

Mrs. Swift was a devoted wife. Her husband's ailments throwing him more and more upon her gentle, patient offices, had all the touching appeal of the weakness of strength to the strength of weakness. No want of his arose which she could not supply. Stout and robust as his spirit remained to the last, his physical strength was so surely shorn away, that no effort of his even strained the slender withes that bound him.

For months before he "went away," his extreme weakness had quieted down the amenities of their pretty married home into something like the solitude and monotony of a cloister. I still made my weekly



calls, no longer with ledgers and correspondence, but simply with the inquiries of his fellow-partners, and news of the business in which his active mind still took interest. I found the house always silent and serene. It seemed to me that if a ray of sunlight was shining anywhere it was always brightest there. The costliest of Mrs. Swift's china was brought to the bedside with the invalid's puddings and possets. The couch itself was brightened with a gorgeous coverlet which had once belonged to a rajah. The choicest of Mrs. Swift's favourite books were not grudged to the poor, damp, risky fingers. They were all ranged in readiness on a side-table, cheerful in their morocco and gilding—"The Christian Year," Herbert's "Temple," A Kempis's "Imitation," Quarles's "Emblems," and an antique edition of "sweet Willison's" works. I could see the light of their soothing influence on Mrs. Swift's pale face, even as I knew that it was on the strength of their sure foundations that her husband stood so bravely and so cheerily face to face with death.

It strikes me now that perhaps his wife's weakness of grasp and narrowness of vision were not so utterly unknown to George Swift as tenderly concealed and comforted. For I remember that during one of my last interviews with him, when we two happened to

be left alone for a while, a gaudily bound, coarsely-printed copy of "Robinson Crusoe" fell from the bed. I picked it up, and with his old, gay smile, he stretched out his feeble hand for it, and tucked it under the pillow, saying—

"Their Uncle Tom, the captain, sent it to our lads for a New-year's gift. I had one sent to me when I was about their age, and since I lost it when I was wrecked off St. Helena twenty years ago, I've never seen a copy. It's like talking to an old friend who has a pleasant tongue, but still means more than he says. I don't let Lucy see me reading it, for I know it must seem a queer thing to be amusing myself with shipwrecks and desert islands, when I'm within a day's journey of heaven. It might make her think I was heedless, or else losing my head. But God, He knows it's neither. Death is one thing to the living and another to the dying. God himself has lived and died, and knows all about it. Lucy will know in time. But it's no use fretting her needlessly. It might make her think I did not care about her bonny hymns and wise old sermons. She'd not find it easy to believe that I can take my thoughts straight from one to the other, and that they seem to me to be no more apart than the sun and the trees in the same landscape. So I just keep

the book here, and have a gossip with it between whiles. And now, good-bye to you, Edward Garrett, and another good-bye in case I don't see you again. Always have a turn at cricket when you can, a steady lad is not in danger of having too much of it, and will love his Bible all the more for his healthy game. You can't read or understand any better for having bile spots floating before your eyes. Good-bye to you, Ned, and God bless you and everybody else in or under the firm."

On my way down-stairs, with a strange moisture in my eyes, I nearly stumbled over Mrs. Swift, bringing a child in each hand to receive the good-night blessing of their dying father. They were two little lads of six and ten years of age, and though they had learned to be quiet and obedient in the house of sorrow, the shadow it cast over them was still so short, that when I had arrived I had seen them enjoying a hearty game of romps in a neighbour's garden. But I thought that their earthly father, as well as the heavenly One, understood all about it.

Next day they were orphans.

But although Mr. Swift's death rendered my visits to Canonbury much less frequent, yet my acquaintanceship with the widow never dropped. She

continued to hold a small sleeping interest in our firm, under some provision of her husband's partnership-deed, and one little business or another brought her now and again to our counting-house. She used to come in softly, in her deep plain mourning, generally leading a rosy-faced boy by the hand, who always escaped from her while she sat and talked, and made himself at home with the porters and warehousemen, in a game at hide-and-seek among the big bales and dark closets.

I am quite sure that Mrs. Swift mourned for her husband deeply and sincerely, but I am equally sure that she did not suffer as much in her mourning as do those spirits whose quicker flow and keener sympathies can never be utterly frozen and self-absorbed. She never knew that anguish of the involuntary mirth of an aching heart. And she carried about with her a subduing atmosphere that toned down all disturbing elements before they reached her, as a painted window softens the glaring sunlight into harmony with the dim grey cloisters.

By-and-by, something of my old intimacy with the household at Cantonbury was renewed. Mrs. Swift had little business affairs of her own, and was very feminine in their management. She wished to economise for the sake of her children's future. And her

way to do so was, with a great trouble and much scraping, to save a trifle which she could have netted at once by cutting off any single household luxury. For instance, she had money in the funds, and was anxious to spare the trifling expenses of receiving the dividends under a power of attorney to the sleepy old legal firm, who took care of her marriage settlement, partnership-deed, and two or three leases. At the same time she was too timid to go alone to the bank to receive them. The way she hit the happy mean, was to ask me to go with her, and out of that, it came quite naturally to invite me home to superintend the tremulous filling up of her tax-papers, and even to help her to write her letters to her solicitor.

Whenever I saw that mother and her boys together, I could scarcely refrain from a smiling remembrance of the old, old fable of the hen and the ducklings. They were taken such care of, those two dear, hearty, spanking boys!" They had the softest and warmest of muffetees and socks, the most daintily nourishing food, the most aggravatingly punctual physic. It was rearing young oaks as if they were exotics! Mrs. Swift had an excellent servant, a good faithful woman, who never felt she was doing her duty unless she was toiling from morning till night, polishing the bright and cleaning the spotless. Her

name was Jane Shipton. I remember on one occasion she shed tears because Alan Swift called her "Old Mother Shipton."

"I don't know what I've done to deserve it," she said. "I only hopes he'll always have some one to serve him as faithful. And when his ma told him to ask pardon, he said I might know he couldn't mean it, because I'm an old maid!"

I took Alan Swift to task about this misdemeanour, thinking that he might respect the reproof of one who, if only two-and-twenty himself, was quite a "grown-up man" to a boy of thirteen.

"It is not kind to make any sort of fun of people, even in play, if they don't like it," I said; "and it's always rude to call nick-names."

Alan didn't attempt the defensive. "She needn't have snivelled," he said; "she might have boxed my ears. What right had she to snivel?"

Mrs. Swift told me once that she was sorry she could not satisfy her sons with her choice of acquaintances for them. They might invite the school-master's little boy (who was about seven years old) every evening if they liked—and he was the dearest little well-bred child, she could assure me, and so intelligent that she herself could make quite a companion of him. And there was a nice lad next door,

whom it was real kindness to ask in, since he was a cripple. Yet her two boys would not be satisfied with these companions, but would stay out playing with who-knows-who on Newington Green. They were always asking for this or that schoolfellow to be invited, but she was not going to ask children to her house, of whose parents she knew<sup>1</sup> nothing, except perhaps, what shop they kept or where they sat in church. Alan was getting a great notion of boating. She did not believe in it. She should be terrified to death to know he was out on the water, rowing in one of those "horrible cockle-shells." She<sup>2</sup> was afraid he might go without her knowledge—he was always so restless when she tried to get him to promise never to attempt such a thing.

I ventured to suggest that it might be better to desire Allan to indulge in no surreptitious rashness, with a promise of free permission at the proper time and with fitting protection.<sup>3</sup>

"I don't believe there is any proper time, or any sufficient precaution, Mr. Garrett<sup>4</sup>," she answered, with her little fizzing heat. "How should I feel if I planned my boy's going, and he was brought home drowned? No, I will keep him from going as long as I can. I only fear he will soon grow beyond my keeping."

I got the boy's version too.

"What do we want with a baby of seven?" Alan would ask indignantly. "I'll set up his toy-farms for him, and play with the magnet and lode-stone a bit. I'll do what is agreeable for anybody. But I want something of my own—somebody that can go in for a jolly game, without fear of his being hurt and squealing—like that baby."

"The baby's old enough to be a tell-tale though," George Swift chimed in, with a wise shake of his curly yellow head.

"I don't mind that," responded Alan with lofty scorn. "All we do bears telling. Only it does make one look a fool to have all sorts of trifles talked over in the school. As for lame Jamie Scott, he's a real brick, and as clever as he can be. But what's the good of having two legs if you're to be tied up to them that have one? I know Jamie himself is awful sorry he can't play foot-ball."

I made all the peace I could, by doing my utmost to bring the mother and sons to a good understanding of each other's feelings. It seems a strange thing to say, but I think their soundness of nature and their great love for each other by no means diminished the strife. If Allan and George had held their mother lightly, and been prepared to go their own



ways without strict deference to her opinion, the struggle would have ceased. But they were good lads, who wanted to be obedient and dutiful, while she was not to be pleased except by sacrifices against which the natures which God had given them rebelled more than they did. I have often quite pitied little George Swift wistfully walking on the bank of a hard-frozen stream where he might not slide, or Alan, deprived of his only delights, still making-believe to enjoy a hand at conversation cards.

I am sorry to say that peace did not come with years. I often wondered what would be the end of it, when Alan walked home with me in the twilight, building boyish castles in the air, of future adventures by land or sea, whilst his mother had been confiding to me that she should presently open negotiations with her solicitor and her stockbroker, as to their receiving him as an articulated pupil, adding that she had no wish to force her son's inclinations—he could choose between the two, or, if he preferred it, she dared say either of these gentlemen would kindly introduce him to some reputable merchant who would find him a seat in his counting-house.

One dull winter evening I called at the house at Canonbury, relative to some little question concerning some cottages belonging to Mrs. Swift. I found

the widow alone, and, in spite of her nervous attention to the details of her trifling business, it struck me that she was uncomfortably preoccupied.

Tea-time came, and Jane Shipton was already setting out the pink china, the thin bread-and-butter, seed-cake, and muffins, when George Swift rushed in, flushed and eager, pausing to acknowledge my presence with pleasant frankness, and then pleading—

“Mamma, I’ve come to ask if Alan and I mayn’t stay for the evening with Captain Shaw. He’s telling us such jolly stories, and he’s got out the model ship.”

The blue-eyed boy was far too candid to withhold a word of the very delight which would endanger the prayed-for permission.

Mrs. Swift answered suddenly with that sharp hardness which is the sole form of active decision possessed by some natures—

“No, you shall not. Go back and tell Alan to come away instantly. I will not have you gadding about, while there are good friends sitting in your own comfortable home.”

It made me feel that the boys would hate the sight of me.

“Oh, do let us stay!” George begged, with a

pitiful quiver about his mouth, which showed how well he understood that tone. "You can't say you don't know Captain Shaw, ma. You've met him at all the parties at the rectory. And Uncle Tom liked him so much when he saw him. • And he's such a good man!"

"When I speak, George, I intend to be obeyed," Mrs. Swift answered chillingly. "And people may be very good in their own way, without being desirable friends for you. Uncle Tom is not you, and you are not Uncle Tom, George. Go back and give my message to Alan, and say Mr. Garrett is here, and he is to come straight home, for tea is on the table, and the muffins are getting cold."

As the boy went off, she turned to me, half crying:—"I can't endure their constantly going to Captain Shaw's. He's an old sea-captain, and his wife lets him have a glass of grog at tea-time, and smoke in the parlour. I know he's sober and good, and thoroughly religious, I do believe; but he's a rough man, that's quite enjoyed his own hardships, and makes the boys think them just fine fun. It's the same with their uncles. It's quite a relief to me that none of them come into London—except Uncle Tom now and then with his ship, and then he's too busy to leave it much. They're no consi-

deration for my feelings as a mother. I've nothing in the world but those two boys, and I can't give them up. How could I sit here lonely, not knowing where they were, or what they were doing? Why can't they be left in peace to settle down in good, comfortable situations, and come home to me in the evening? It seems hard to find them so glad to leave this pretty, snug parlour for Captain Shaw's smoky room, with old cane chairs and a bit of torn drugget on the floor."

I could see the poor lady was far too excited for me to suggest that you may spoil a beagle or a St. Bernard by keeping it on the hearth-rug and feeding it with milk, but that no efforts will turn it into a satisfactory tabby cat. I knew that my own sister Ruth had restrained many wild vagaries of my much tamer nature, but then she had done it by counter-temptations of a far different kind from muffins and china ornaments. She had trained, where Mrs. Swift was fain to transform.

The lads came in, George woeful, Alan flashed and tart. Their mother spoke to them in a fretfully caressing way, and for the first time I was sorry to see Alan treat her with a contemptuous indifference. But I presently found I had been invited there that evening with an ulterior object to the letting of the

cottages. Mrs. Swift had a bit in readiness for the mouth of her fiery young colt, and instinct told her it was such a trying one, that her timidity sought the restraint and screen of a third party's presence.

"Mr. Denham was asking after you in his last letter, Alan," she said. Mr. Denham was the family solicitor.

"Very much obliged to him," said Alan gruffly.

"He was remarking that you must be quite a young man," she added. "He wants to know your exact age."

Alan said nothing.

"The fact is," she went on, with desperate courage, "I had written to him about you. I thought it would be such a fine thing if he took you for an articled clerk."

"Denham's too knowing," said the unsuspecting Alan. "He knows I'm not the right sort."

"On the contrary," answered the mother, delighted, "Mr. Denham says that he will be most happy to receive you, and he has really made a very handsome offer as regards premium."

Alan dropped his muffin in his dismay. "I'll never be a lawyer," he said; "I couldn't if I tried. And I'd sooner break stones in the road!"

Mrs. Swift burst into tears, and buried her poor

thin face in her soft, scented handkerchief. "I've always been afraid of this," she sobbed, "and it will break my heart." Then pathos breaking into passion, she cried, "It's all through your uncles and Captain Shaw! Nothing will satisfy you but to go to sea, and bring down my grey hairs in sorrow to the grave. You won't hear reason. You've just set your heart on that one thing—now, haven't you, Alan? Own it."

"That I'm sure I've not," said the youth, shamed and flurried by his mother's breakdown. "I've not made up my mind to anything. I'd like to go to sea, but I'd as soon settle in the bush or backwoods, or even take a turn at the diggings."

I believe he said it in all candour, thinking to soothe her, for most of her expressed terrors had been in regard to the profession of the maternal grandfather and uncles, and the dreaded Captain Shaw. She had never known her husband in the perils of his early adventures, and had so far failed to bring them within the realisation of her fears, that sometimes her sons had actually induced her to tell what she knew about them. But now, as poor Alan uttered his alternatives, each seemed worse than the other, and she fairly shrieked with horror.

I never passed a more painful evening. I was

the reluctant and sorrowful witness of the first open breach in the sympathy between mother and son. The weak, timid woman was shrill and voluble in her agony; more than that, she grew hard and unjust, threatening the powers of her maternal guardianship; with about the same effect as a red flag is waved before a bull. Alan had been pained at first, anxious only to gain a fair hearing and a little time. But presently he grew sullen and then fierce, till at last with angry words he flung himself out of the apartment, and locked himself into the cold and darkness of his bedroom. When I came away, having utterly failed to pour oil on the troubled waters, I heard Jane Shipton knocking at his door, with a candlestick and a supper-tray, her knock and her exhortations appearing to be alike fruitless.

Within a month afterwards, Mrs. Swift had occasion to call at our counting-house. In spite of a formality and precision even deeper than usual, there was a little uneasy triumph in her manner which I could not at all understand till just before she went, when she let drop, in quite an accidental way, that she might as well call in at Mr. Denham's office and take up her son Alan, who had just entered on his articles there.

I was glad to hope that the mother and son had come to a right understanding of one another. But I could not repress a doubt.

By-and-by I came across Alan Swift in the City streets. I could see that the poor lad could not forget the degradation of that miserable evening. He shunned me when he could, and when he could not, he was either shy or reckless. Once or twice I saw him with companions whose appearance did not prepossess me. One evening when I was at Canonbury he did not come in all the while I was there, and his absence was not mentioned or explained in the old friendly way. George dawdled about lonely and listless, and his mother was absent-minded. On another occasion, Alan came in to tea, but went out immediately afterwards, without any word of explanation. Mrs. Swift tried to feel herself satisfied; but I was sadly afraid she had bought a rag of flimsy power at the terrible price of her real influence.

He was a handsome young fellow, Alan Swift. Our Mr. Lambert had often said in his kindly way, that the lad's face was as good as a change of air. It had beauty of feature and nature together, each adding to the other. There are faces whose goodness is their sole beauty, as there is sweetness



in the flattest tract of country that boasts bountiful homesteads and well-tilled fields. There are other faces which keep a beauty of their own in spite of the curse that is on them, like some grand old rock that shelters a pirate's den, or like those lovely German dells, whose sun-lit towers are but the turrets of gaming hells. The one beauty makes one smile, the other makes one sigh, but when the two meet in a young innocent face, somehow one smiles and sighs at once, and looks away, and almost fears to look back again, lest in the meantime something should have vanished !

I tried to hope it was only the consciousness I had accidentally acquired, which made me fancy that Alan grew to look hard and old, that the fresh bloom died off his face, and left it worn and hollowed, "like the side of a brae where the torrent has been." I said to myself that his sedentary confinement would naturally make him paler and thinner, and I would not allow myself to think anything worse, till one day our head traveller, a shrewd but thoroughly worldly man, remarked, with a complacent sneer—

"Young Swift has broken his tether at last. He's no better than the rest now. I dare say he will end worse. That sort generally do. Their strict

bringing-up makes 'em run to the opposite extreme."

"I knew the man who was speaking. Outwardly respectable, and honest in his business, he was so thoroughly godless, that his words alarmed me greatly. I had but one hope left—that some indiscretion on Alan's part had been taken for a great deal more than it was worth by the sinister judgment of a man who knew nothing about charity. And so the folly of poor Mrs. Swift's fight with nature was bringing discredit on all godly discipline. I wished I could do something for Alan, but it was difficult to know what movement to make. I was a sufficiently old acquaintance to have a right to speak to his mother, but I knew enough of her feeble, alarmed nature to doubt whether that might not do more harm than good. The boy himself seemed a more hopeful subject. I lay awake half the night thinking over it.

If I had only known what was going on while I lay sleepless! Somewhere in the small hours, the neat hall-door of the Canonbury villa opened, and a young slight figure crept stealthily out in the darkness. I wonder if it turned to take a last look at its old home. It was a starlight night. The stars looked down and kept their secret.

Next morning, Alan Swift "was not."

Oh, it was a sad time for the widow's household! There was no doubt that the lamb had gone forth among the wolves of its own poor wilful choice. We discovered reasons for its going — disgraces and dangers that had pricked it out of its home-hold. Sins truly, follies manifold, but not one that might not have been repented of humbly before God, and atoned for honourably unto man. "God keep the boy's conscience ever as tender and as pure," said good Mr. Lambert, not ashamed to drop a tear on the useless advertisements which he wrote out for his old partner's son:

Mrs. Swift puzzled us almost to anger. Though bitterest suffering was written sternly on her parched, pinched face, she seemed only concerned to make her own justification out of the condemnation of her boy. She blamed herself truly, but it was only for not being strict enough and earlier repressive. She turned round upon her brother, Uncle Tom, and her neighbour, Captain Shaw, accusing them fiercely. "This is your doing. You were determined to rob me of my boy somehow. Rejoice in your work. For me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved. But at least, I will not fret myself over a reprobate runaway, as I might well have done, if I had con-

sented to his going. I have kept him in as much as I could. He was not to be kept in. He must go his way."

Jane Shipton shed more tears—at least visibly—than her mistress. Jane had her own private fears, though she never doubted Mrs. Swift's wisdom.

"You see, sir," she said, "I'd known him from his cradle, and lived with him so long that I a'most forget he wasn't a little boy now, but a grown young gentleman. I never meant to nag him. It was only my way of trying to keep peace between him and his ma. I'm sure I'd give all my savings, though I'm an old woman that shan't make many more, to see him safe and well, a-going straight through the big plate o' buttered toast!"

I could not help thinking that Mrs. Swift's heart must belie her hard and bitter words. Even her obstinate adherence to her old opinions did not shake my belief. As there are people who will not cast up their accounts for fear of the balance against them, so there are others who will not even reconsider their ways when they are half self-convicted, but try to stave off repentance because it is the forerunner of too bitter a remorse.

She strengthened the narrow limits in which she set her only remaining son, but she did it feverishly,

and with unnecessary reiteration that she might spare her trouble, for he was a very good boy, quite different to poor Alan; though the brothers were really reflections of each other, except that Alan's waving brown locks were golden on George's head, and that George had hitherto been considered the least studious and the most gamesome of the pair.

There was a silent pain and question between the mother and son. George was loyal to his lost brother, and there was a gap made in his young life which could never be filled up; it set a discord in everything, marking the boy out for much morbid notice and criticism. After the first season of anxious inquiry, I don't think Mrs. Swift and George ever spoke to each other of the subject which each knew was uppermost in the other's thoughts.

Life rolled on sluggishly in the house at Canonbury. Quiet as it had always been, it was now no more its old self, than a canal is the river which feeds it. Birthdays, Christmas-days, New Years, came and passed, each with its own type of memory and pain. George saw that his mother often trembled a little when a letter was put into her hands. She cared no more to go to her old favourite tea-parties, though she was better pleased than ever to receive a visitor at home. And she came to need a fire in the grate

on the warmest day in June, and to know directly whenever the wind was in the east—an instinct which she had entirely lost for many years.

It was noticeable, too, that her dictation to George never took certain forms. She might speak sharply or maintain a pathetic silence of disapprobation as to his comings-in and goings-out. She might make herself the law as to when he should carry an umbrella, or begin to wear muffetees; but he was now past eighteen, and she never made an inquiry or dropped a hint as to his future career. Confident as she still professed to be in her own wisdom and rightness, she evidently shrunk from giving it that final test under which it had exploded in the first instance.

But where there is no explosion, there may be effervescence. The signs of deterioration in George Swift were quicker and plainer than they had ever been in Alan. He lost his energetic step, his taut trimness of apparel. He dawdled; he slouched; he could sit doing nothing till he absolutely fell asleep. He had no particular pleasures, no particular friends—just a few limp pursuits and slight acquaintances. And yet one could see that it was not natural inertness, only the rust of good metal unused, something like a railway engine lying idle for lack of steam.

And moral engines, like physical ones, are too valuable to be left useless long. Somebody will take possession of them, and drive them—somewhither!

He would stir up sometimes. Once he helped to save a woman from a burning house. His mother did not know he was at the fire till it was over. She would have expostulated with him for going, but she was proud of his humane feat.

“It was nothing at all,” he said. “You don’t think what you’re doing till you’ve done it. What credit does that deserve?”

But one heroism no more fills a life than one statue furnishes a house, though it may make the surrounding emptiness more painful. I found presently that George had dropped all habit of divine worship. He just lounged away his Sundays. His mother submitted. Whilst she stuck stoutly to her old theories, she had learned to dread putting them in practice. Her petty power had turned round and torn her own heart; influence she did not know. She understood no legislation but Draco’s. She was like an unwise colonist, who trying to introduce formal codes among wild natives, signally fails, and when the march of civilisation overtakes and demands such laws, finds them branded as obsolete and impracticable. Her word was still in her mouth, but her heart dared

not obey it. She had lost the consistency on which she had prided herself—she was self-despised.

Poor mother! I often pitied her when I came upon her in her dainty parlour, with the spring-smell of hyacinths in its lace-draped window, while she sat in her easy-chair before the fire, and drew her Indian shawl about her with nervous, transparent fingers. There was always some costly, elaborate work in the basket at her hand, always a set of Mudie's books on the table. There were always long, elderly sentimental letters coming in from lady correspondents all over the town, and careful old Jane never failed to provide some chicken's scrap of seasonable dainty for every meal. But the woman's heart, wider and deeper than it knew, had a want which none of these things could supply. In grasping at the husk it had missed the kernel; in striving to keep the flowers in the fruit-season, it was left with empty basket among dropping, faded leaves.

The little treasured store of holy-soothing books was still always at hand, their soft hues and rich gilding scarcely dimmed for all her constant but careful use. Yet I think she found them like a jewel-casket of which she had lost the key; or rather, their words were as unstrung pearls straying about her heart, only to show the dust and darkness



of its corners. The suffering of selfishness is not the suffering which wins the peace that passeth understanding. There are crowns of very real thorns which can never blossom into crowns of glory

One day I chanced to find her with the traces of hastily-dashed-away tears very visible on her face. A little homely edition of Doddridge's "Rise and Progress" lay near her, with her gold eye-glass on its page. It was open at the chapter of "The Case of a Christian under the Hidings of God's Face."

But she had a little news for me that day. She was expecting a visit from the widow of her almost unknown brother James, the American settler. She had not yet seen her sister-in-law, who had only arrived in England two or three days before, and was still detained at Liverpool. She said that Mrs. James "was said to be a very charming person; quite a cultivated lady, although she had passed so many years among the rough ranchmen and Indian "braves" of Colorado. She should think the poor thing, who was by birth a New England woman, and very well connected, must be heartily glad to get back to civilisation."

She wanted to persuade me to come and meet Mrs. James on the very day of her arrival, pleading

that time, distance, and silence had rendered the sanctities of relationship between them merely nominal. However, I refused to put in my appearance until the second day of Mrs. James's visit.

When I went, I found a more living atmosphere in the house than had been there for many a day. Mrs. Swift was not hugging herself over the parlour fire, but bustled in from the kitchen. There was only her at home just then, she apologized. George had escorted his aunt to call on her man of business, and they must have been detained, but they would be sure to be in presently. The good lady had evidently bestirred herself to be hospitable, and the gracious law of compensation had reflected back the sunshine.

"No," she said, with the little soft laugh that I had not heard for many a day, "she should not tell me one word about Mrs. James; I should see her in less than half an hour, and that must be soon enough."

Aunt and nephew came in. The lady went to lay aside her out-door apparel, the youth came straight to the parlour. He looked aroused and freshened. "They had come back as quickly as they could," he said. "Aunt Eunice was a famous walker."

"And yet she looks but a little frail thing," commented his mother.

"It's not strength, it's spirit," George replied, in a tone conveying that the latter was everything in his opinion.

A soft rustle at the door, and a small neat woman came forward, with old-fashioned courtesy. She was dressed in some clinging black material, with a Quaker-like cap tied tightly over her waving brown hair. You could not find a quieter woman in dress or person. It was not for the first moment that you noticed the flash of her fine diamond ring, or the deep steady light of her clear eyes.

But it was long since I had passed a pleasanter evening than that proved. Yet the stranger seemed by no means its heroine. She might tell a few good stories of her settler life, with graphic details of its surroundings, but that might have all gone for nothing, had Mrs. Swift not been so uncommonly genial and gracious, and George so interested and lively. Yet what made them so? I was afraid our hostess might be prejudiced by these "traveller's tales.\*" But no. Told by a gentlewoman, whose every word seemed redolent of piety and peace, Mrs. Swift caught the inner meaning which she had quite lost in the rough narrations of her old home at Tynemouth, and the later histories of Captain Shaw. All the physical hardship, all the danger, all the

privation, but made more beautiful the sweet spiritual light that sanctified them, like sunshine on rugged black rocks.

Somehow, it struck me that Mrs. James had for Mrs. Swift the fascination of one who is gently and wisely unfolding a valuable secret—the attraction we would feel for one who holds for us a glass that will bring near a beautiful landscape that has been lying before us always, but hitherto unseen.

I have never met a more cultivated woman. You may multiply Ladies' Colleges as you like through the length and breadth of the land, but such education as hers will be as rare then as now. She had only studied under a Yankee "school-ma'am," but God and Love and Duty had been patiently teaching her ever since, whether she was reading rare treatises in her uncle's Harvard library, or watching the stars and the flowers from her Colorado hut. She was no learned woman. She did not call anything by its scientific name. She knew much because she had kept her eyes and her heart open, and whatever she did not know she sought to make her own, as candidly and cordially as she turned strangers into friends.

It was quite settled that she was to make a long stay in the villa at Canonbury.

I was with them during her first Sunday there. The two ladies had been to chapel. I don't know whether Mrs. James had any suspicion how her nephew had passed the morning, but at any rate she inquired demurely—

“And what service do you attend, George?”

The young man coloured a little. “Well, I'm not attending anywhere just at present,” he replied. “Mother's chapel is so slow, and the minister gives me the horrors.”

“I'm sure it was an excellent sermon this morning,” sighed Mrs. Swift; “did not you think so, sister?”

“Yes, indeed,” said Mrs. James. “It was quite a rich treat to me, whose outward spiritual privileges have been rather poor during my travels. But still tastes differ, especially under different circumstances.”

“So I always say,” George readily assented.

“Is this very far from Gore Chapel?” she inquired presently.

“Gore Chapel is half-way across London,” I said.

“Oh dear! Then I cannot venture there by myself,” she observed. “I am so sorry.”

“Who preaches there?” asked George.

“I don't know who is the regular minister,” she

answered, "but to-night the sermon is to be by a man whom I have often longed to hear or even just to see! For if one gets a glimpse of God's glory by gazing at a grand mountain or beautiful lake, I think one is likely to get quite as much by looking upon the face of a man who, for the love of God, left all that he had, and lived for forty years among the savages of Africa."

"He must be a good, earnest man," said Mrs. Swift.

"It takes something to realise all that is meant by forty years in the wilderness," Mrs. James observed. "The nearest approach I ever knew to it was when I did not see one woman's face for six months when we first went to Colorado. That was a very small matter in comparison, but it helps me a little to understand the other."

"Why, he must have built his own house and done his own housework," cried George. "What a glorious muddle it must have been! Jolly, though!"

"I dare say he didn't find it jolly," said his mother, shaking her head.

"Oh, I'm not at all sure of that," interposed Mrs. James, quite briskly; "of course flesh and spirit might fail sometimes. But depend upon it, some natural inclination and suitability were his 'leading'

to that kind of work. A college professor would have been very uncomfortable and out of place at it, and perhaps my missionary would have been as uncomfortable and out of place in a divinity hall. One man can preach the plain Gospel, and show forth the rudiments of industry and cleanliness; and another can combat the arguments of infidelity, and keep a herd of students in order. The one who is fittest to bear hardship and loneliness and danger, would perhaps but ill endure studious confinement, the midnight lamp, and theological antagonism. Every man to his work, in the kingdom of God, as in the world of nature."

"But we are meant to sacrifice our own inclinations, sister," put in Mrs. Swift.

Mrs. James turned upon her with a power of sunshine in her gracious face.

"We must sacrifice them so far as they would sacrifice Christ," she said; "but we must not sacrifice them when by so doing we should sacrifice Christ too. If a man was translating the Bible, would you make him transcribe it with his feet instead of his fingers, because that would be the greater sacrifice of comfort? Is that the sacrifice which God requires? Would it not be rather that he should do his work in the way that would best

and soonest accomplish it, not leaving it for any call of pleasure or inclination, or even passing weariness? Why, sister, God made the world to be an easy and pleasant world; all the difficulty and struggle has been rendered necessary through the devil. Self-sacrifice is but the saint's first step on the ladder to heaven. The higher he goes, the less he knows of it; for his will conforms to his Lord's, and it becomes no sacrifice to do whatever his King requires. Do you know, Lucy dear, I don't know that I should so deeply reverence my missionary if I did not hear that, after all his sublime experience, he is the most gladsome of men, and says that he is longing to leave our fogs and rains, and morning calls and evening dress, and to go back to his dear Africa and a 'sensible way of life.' I am very sorry to miss seeing him!"

"I'll be most happy to take you this evening, aunt," George volunteered; and was instantly thanked as warmly and spontaneously as if this offer were not the very mark at which she had been aiming all the time!

A few weeks afterwards, I chanced to meet George, with his mother and aunt, all going together to the once-despised "slow" chapel. After two Sabbath evening attendances on the great missionary, and



some other celebrated preacher whom Aunt James wanted to hear, on the third Sunday morning George took her to the usual family place of worship. The sermon was no better than it always was, for it was always excellent, and it must have been some change in George which made him say that the minister was improving, for the discourse was really capital. In the course of the week, the minister chanced to call at the Canonbury villa—led there, perhaps, by the reappearance of the stray lamb of his flock. All the household were at home, and Mrs. James drew out George himself into giving their guest some interesting details of the great missionary's sermon, the pastor having a strong personal interest in the subject, because he had a brother who had traded on the same savage coast. I fancy the good old man must have understood Mrs. James's cue, for presently he began to tell of a night-school which he had started in a rough district, with all its half-humorous, half-pathetic difficulties, and his urgent want of young, strong, spirited help, such as George himself could give. And when George drew back shamed and self-distrustful, feeling that he needed rather to learn than to teach, the kind old pastor bade him to remember that trying to teach was the best way to learn, but that meanwhile, he only wanted "some

snapping fellow to keep the lads in order," and should call in that very evening on his way to the school, and carry George off by sheer force!

George went; and I understood became both useful and popular, and he certainly developed so much liveliness and energy, that he often touchingly reminded me of my old favourite, Alan. But by-and-by he grew grave, not with the old, listless dumpishness, but with a manly, noble gravity, as of one before whom the solemnities of life and death had opened.

Have I a reader who does not believe in conversion? Do not think I am dreaming of a Fijian or Bosjesman auditor. There are very civilised people, and people who pass as religious, who do not practically believe in conversion. They will tell you what such and such a man used to be—tell them that "he is changed," and they will only smile incredulously. I don't know what they make of the Bible; I don't know why they think Christ wasted his life and death. Perhaps they have a dim idea that nations may be converted, though not individuals. For my own part, I doubt all reformation that is not conversion. I can easily believe in the blackest sinner transformed into the brightest saint. I suspect the most moderate reprobate when he professes

to adopt the most ordinary respectability. Man may sweep the devils from his own heart, but only God can fill it with his Spirit, and if it lie empty, the old legion will come back with many recruits, and the last estate of that man shall be worse than the first. Therefore I thanked God that, along with the outward signs of revived brightness and activity in his young life, George Swift gave unconscious evidences of that humility, patience, and submission, of which the mere natural man is no more capable than is the thistle of bearing grapes.

He took a very lowly, hard-working situation in a City office, and persevered in his duties with diligence and contentment. One could not doubt what a struggle it was. The ageing, subdued lines on the handsome young face told what he did not.

I never quite understood how it came to an end. There was a proposal of emigration for some of the youths at the night-school where George Swift taught. He interested himself in this project with characteristic enthusiasm. I think his aunt, whose stay in the Swifts' house had only terminated by her settlement in their immediate neighbourhood, put one or two plain questions to him. She was a shrewd woman, and could frame them so, that his candour could only answer yes or no. Then, I think,

haps one, perhaps two, perhaps three. I dare say the two ladies wept together. I am sure they prayed. For only prayer could have strengthened poor Mrs. Swift's motherly heart to bid her son go forth, and live out the full life that was in him, in the way that God had intended. All the particulars I ever heard was in one short conversation with Mrs. James.

"It was very hard for sister Lucy," said the little woman with a tender shake of her gentle head, "very hard; for he was her all. But she had grown to see that what was best for him must be best for her. I could see she was deeply impressed by my history of the very happiest family I ever knew. There were three boys and one girl. And they, every one of them, went away from their parents, thousands of miles. The daughter did not care to go for going's sake, but she followed her husband, like a true wife, and her mother was proud of her for it. And none of the four ever missed a post in writing home, and the old people's cottage was quite a pretty sight for the curiosities which their children sent them. Two of the boys died in their parents' lifetime, one at sea and one in a foreign hospital, and were very sadly bemoaned; but not by comfortless mourners. 'They've got first to the real Home,'

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said the mother. 'It seems cheerier-like to know they're waiting there for us. There's generally a child or two taken first. Maybe the Lord sets 'em to work getting ready a place for the old folk. It's what my boys were always saying they'd do, and perhaps they'll do it yet, better than they could here below.' 'It's hard to hear folks saying we can't miss them much, since we'd really lost them long ago,' said the father, who was a pious, plain Vermonter. 'I guess we ain't lost them yet. I'd not give a cent for the boy that puts his foot on the stove in the old house, and sits there, wishing he was anywhere else in the world. Give me the lad that can go anywhere, and say, "There's no place like home." I reckon it don't matter where the body is, if the heart's in the right place.' 'I think, Mr. Garrett, that brave story did Lucy good. They are both dead now, those good people, but you see they have left a memory like a bracing breeze. And so, at last, dear sister Lucy spoke to George himself; and though he tried very hard to make her believe that he was quite healthy and happy where he is, the dear honest fellow could not succeed, and it is settled that he shall go out with the little emigrant party. It almost puts me in mind of the good old days of the *Mayflower*. They are not to sail for six months,

which they are to spend each in learning what will be most useful to him. There are to be a young minister and his wife of the party, who are both well known in the night-school, and the assistant in the medical dispensary of the neighbourhood is also going with them. They will found a little village of their own, that may grow into a great city some day, and it is to be called Cobb's-town, after our good minister himself. Besides the young pastor, there are three married couples among the emigrants, and four of the elder lads are engaged to very decent girls, who are not to follow them for at least a year, but to remain behind in good domestic service. Mrs. Swift has taken one, and Jane Shipton is quite proud of teaching her. Jane is a capital teacher, she has such thorough economy and industry, and can train the lassie to knit stockings and sew shirts, and make something of every odd and end. Indeed, we shall all be busy enough for the next six months, for we wish to do as much as we can among ourselves to spare the expedition every penny. It is but poor, and then money is worth so much in a new country. George is to spend his six months on a farm, learning both theory and practice of agriculture, and picking up every self-helping habit he can acquire."

During that six months' probation I often called in at Canonbury, and I must say, that though I frequently saw tears glinting in Mrs. Swift's eyes, yet I had never seen her more energetic and cheerful. She got through piles of needle-work, and had some cosy woollen knitting to save even the moments "between the lights." She made kindly acquaintance with all the friends and relations who were to be left behind, and was particularly careful and considerate in her provision for such among the lads—and there were several—who had nobody even to leave. "We must just make them a little sorry to leave ourselves, sister Eunice," she said; "it will not be good for them to go out to a new land without one regret for the old country."

They were off at last. I could well believe, as Mrs. James reiterated, "that it was very hard indeed for sister Lucy." But a neighbourly warmth closed round her. When she listened, trembling, to the wind and the storm, she knew that there was a warm young heart in her kitchen that listened too, and hoped and prayed with her. She was not lonely in her loneliness. And when George's first letter came, and another letter to the kitchen, and the street-door grew noisy with knocks that had come to tell of another letter, and another, all full of love

and good cheer, Mrs. Swift laughed and bustled in her cheerful gladness, and, I think, felt a keener joy and pride in her boy and his affection than she could have ever felt when he sat rusting by her slighted hearth.

Mrs. Swift lived to a good old age. Her son came home three or four times and made long stays with her. He married happily and had children. One little girl was sent to England for her health, and found a pleasant home with her grandmother, whose last days were, I think, her best.

But there never came any tidings of the lost Alan. I think he must have died soon after he ran away from home. I cannot think that my frank-eyed favourite could long have hardened his heart against his mother. We must leave the mystery with God. But I knew what was in Mrs. Swift's mind when I once found her cheerily packing a Christmas hamper to send across the sea.

"It seems quite home-like," said the old lady brightly, popping in a pretty box of sweetmeats. "There's always something to be prepared for—Christmas, or birthdays, or something. It is cheery work for me. But I should like to do twice as much of it," and there the old eyes looked up and thrilled



me with their pathos. "I might have had twice as much. I would not carry God's cross, so I must bear my own. If I had only understood the words I knew so well—

'Were it not better to lie still,  
Let Him strike home, and bless the rod,  
Never so safe as when our will  
Yields undiscerned by all but God!'

Oh, Mr. Garrett, I do not murmur; but if I could be only sure that ALL the suffering of my sin is mine! O Alan, my son, my son, would to God I had died for thee! But God loved Alan better than his mother did, and I must hope on in His mercy."

And I thought of the old proverb which says—"What we keep we lose, what we give we gain." Did not Solomon mean the same when he said, "There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches?"

## V.

### A SIN OF OMISSION.

**A**MONG the connections of our firm was a Mr. Ravel. I had heard the name through all the years of my service, but I had never come in much personal contact with the man till about the time that I myself became a partner in Lambert and Co., when, from certain mutual sympathies that we discovered (but which need not be enumerated here, as they have nothing to do with this story), we were considerably attracted to each other.

The house of La Croix, Ravel, and Co. was of the old aristocracy of commerce. A Louis La Croix and a Hubert Ravel had "come over" after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. They had been bankers in Avignon, but in their exile, like the opulent and liberal Huguenots that they were, they withheld their wealth from usury, and laid it out in looms and factories for their needier compatriots. These they established in Spitalfields, where the exiles for

conscience' sake then swarmed, but, unlike the poor modern refugees for dream and theory, brought prosperity with them in their busy brains and skillful fingers. M. La Croix and his prim, ancient, maiden aunt, who was "devoted" to the memory of one slain at Rochelle, established themselves among their work-people; and presently the Ravels, a younger and sprightlier family, built a stately and commodious mansion in the same locality. The street was not narrower than the ancestral *rue* in Avignon, and so far from shrinking from the shops and courts which came crowding up round their new residence, young Madame Ravel would have thought herself a dull and defrauded woman had she not been able to peep between her flowers, and watch the chaffering and bustle of an industrious thriving thoroughfare.

The La Croixes died out with that generation, but their name was kept up in the firm, perhaps out of some tender French sentiment for saintly childless people. The Ravels had been rather a long-lived race, for the Mr. Ravel that I knew was but the great-great-grandson of the young French pair who built the Spitalfields mansion.

He bore the family Christian name of Hubert. He was a bachelor, and the last of his race. His

Huguenot descent had been twice crossed by Scotch blood on the female side, and Hubert Ravel was no typical Frenchman. The romance and fire of Provence might be there, but it lay under strong reserve. In person, Mr. Ravel was small and slight, with finely-cut features, and he was daintily neat in his apparel, without being in the least a dandy. To see him in his counting-house, or among his business friends, he seemed that rare being, a man of strong character, yet peculiar only for the absence of peculiarities; except one, which I dare say not five people among all his acquaintances had ever noticed. I cannot think how it first caught my observation, but it having once done so, I never failed to see it again and again, till I grew almost angry with myself for watching for it, and felt ready to believe that it might be only the result of some morbid fancy of my own.

With all his quietness, Mr. Ravel was interesting company. He had a dry powder of Scotch humour sprinkled over his clear, glistening French wit. There was nobody more ready than he to recognise a "point" or to make one, and he was given to laugh with a heartier enjoyment than is altogether common among middle-aged men of business. Perhaps it was its very heartiness which first made me

notice how suddenly his laughter would stop—like a ringing bell arrested by a hand upon its clapper.

It was after being struck by this that I observed that however pleased Mr. Ravel might be to meet one, however cheerful he might be throughout the conversation, he no sooner said good-bye than a cloud dropped over his face, and he turned away like one who has stepped for a moment into a merry roadside inn, but must go out again, and lift up his burden, and pursue his uphill way.

It was invariable. Morning, noon, or night, summer or winter, dry business interview or pleasant friendly chat always ended so. Even after consultation over bad losses or sad news, which had given no opportunity for smile or witticism, there was still that curious sense of a shutting up or a shutting out. I have seen fine old cabinets with doors painted in strangely diverse subjects: outside, with cornucopias and heaps of roses, to make beauty and brightness for the chamber, but within, reserved for moments of contemplative mortification, pictures of grim skeletons, or scenes of martyrdom. And the change of expression I have noted on sight-seers as the showman unfolded these, is the nearest to the change that always fell on Hubert Ravel's face as he turned himself back to his solitude.

It grew upon me that with such a man as he, this could be the result of no coarse sensational shifting of mood. It must be something that was always there, like a sorrowful letter hidden behind a mirror, though merry faces are reflected for a moment on its surface.

The first visit I ever paid to his house was in quite a chance kind of way. It was on a Sunday afternoon. I had been wandering dreamily about the quiet City streets, thinking what a blessed God He is, who sent man such a sweet message of rest and peace as the Sabbath-day. I was musing how many, who laud the prince or the legislator who grants a single secular holy-day, have never once remembered to thank the King of kings for his punctual, ideal holy-day which sets the soul at leisure to climb Pisgah, and survey its promised Land. Suddenly, as I turned from the gloomy by-ways into a thoroughfare, who should I see, issuing from a ponderous gate, but Hubert Ravel.

He had been to an afternoon service. I, already a City man of some seventeen years' standing, did not even know that there was a chapel on that spot, although I knew the heavy old gate shut in the buildings of one of the most important City guilds. As the scanty congregation were slow of coming

out, Mr. Ravel and I turned back that I might see the building.

It had no particular interest, even of association. Comfortable burgesses had sat for two hundred years on the soft cushions of those panelled seats, and gazed dreamily at the rich glow of the painted windows. There was plenty of elaborate carving and fine brass-work. There were two or three mural tablets to forgotten citizens and "brothers of the Company." There was a fine organ, sighing forth a rather sleepy voluntary, and there was a kindly, commonplace-looking preacher taking off his gown in the vestry. I could understand the charm such a place might have for the worn-out old almsmen who came there to quaver forth their pious responses, and I should not have wondered to find any aspiring struggling lad turning aside to find a short respite from himself in such a quiet spot, consecrated by centuries of undoubting prayer and praise. But it was a strange place for Hubert Ravel, midway between hectic youth and weary age, unjaded by tear and hurry of commercial excitement, for such business as he meddled with was but a formal ceremony to him,—he had wealth and position beyond its reach. An unworried, lonely, thinking man, one would have fancied he would

seek more stirring regions—would need food rather than anodynes. But he told me he went there every Sabbath.

After a glance round, we returned to the street, and as we were within a few hundred yards of his abode, I did not see any reason why I should refuse his courteous invitation to accompany him there, and join his tea-table.

He no longer lived in the old Spitalfields mansion in Church Street. He himself had not deserted it, but his grandfather had. It had grown unfashionable in the days of that ancestor, and as his grandson succinctly said, "He was not the wisest or best of the Ravel race."

Since that grandfather's time the Ravels had adhered to the mansion which he took in Corded-Friars, though it had certainly become as unfashionable as a place of residence as Spitalfields itself. Mr. Ravel had invited me to visit him before that Sunday, and the direction he had given me was, "Lose yourself in Corded-Friars, and you will find my place." He seemed to follow his own advice; for I could see no method in the way we twisted up one narrow turning and down another, now diving under a frowning arch, then crossing a flagged court, with flying glimpses of an old church that seemed to have



hidden itself among the houses, until at last we came to a paved square, with no thoroughfare even for foot-passengers.

One of its four sides was a high dead back wall of a house that must have been built in the days of the window-tax. Another was the side of a building used as offices, with casements dotted irregularly here and there, and stairs winding past them. The two other sides were stately old red houses, with broad flights of steps, and great stone pillars enlivening their ruddy fronts. One was let out in chambers, and desecrated with a house-agent's notice-board; the other was Hubert Ravel's home.

The place was as still as a nook among the mountains, or as a church on a week-day morning. I followed Mr. Ravel up the steps, and through the great hall; which had a stained-glass window at the farther end. The walls were covered with dark old pictures in heavy frames. Here and there, great white statues menaced us with fierce frowns or stretched-out hands, and our feet fell dumb on the thick Turkey carpet. Ours seemed to be the only life there. There must have been servants somewhere to maintain that wonderful neatness and cleanliness, yet the place had the atmosphere of an urban hermitage.

• We went straight down the hall, and then Mr. Ravel opened the last door on the right, and we entered a chamber, small in dimensions, and meagrely plain in appointment. It was scarcely suitable for the "housekeeper's room" in such an establishment. The pattern was nearly worn from the drugget, the chairs were hard and shabby, the table-cover was dim and colourless, and there were no pictures but one over the mantel—an ill-painted portrait of a rather striking-looking youth. Yet the cheerful fire in the cramped grate, and the common tea-service set in readiness on the table, proclaimed this to be the ordinary living apartment of Hubert Ravel.

He bade me take a seat, remarking that Mrs. Chance would soon come in; and she presently entered—an elderly woman, some years older than my host, with a rather vacant face, which might have been called pretty at that early period of life when wisdom is not thought a necessary ingredient in feminine good-looks. She had a limp, lackadaisical, eighteenth-century kind of elegance about her, and was altogether the type of being whom I should have thought particularly aggravating to a straightforward, sensible man like Mr. Ravel.

She rattled away with her tongue and the tea-cups.

Did I live in the City, too? And did I really like it? Well, for her part she could not think how any one stayed in London who could get out of it. She loved nature. Give her a cottage among the trees, with fresh flowers in the garden, and dear little birds hopping about.

I glanced at Mr. Ravel. He only smiled gravely and observed, "I thought you said you did not ever like the sparrows' noise on our great tree."

Well, she didn't. Sparrows were different—common, sooty things; she meant dear little robin red-breasts, and larks, and linnets, and that sort. A *nuance* of difference made all the difference in the world. Mrs. Chance sprinkled her discourse with French, as one peppers flavourless meat.

She was not a woman who is diffident in giving her opinions on things in general, or in particular. She was vain of her folly, which is by no means an uncommon vanity. She had no toleration or forbearance towards the statesman who was just then painfully steering his country through a great storm. She could not understand the magnitude of his task, the terrible responsibility on his hands—but she could condemn. He was a bad man—a heartless man—an incipient tyrant—a hypocritical panderer

to the lower orders. And such things as were said about his private life!—of course they were all true; she was never one to believe there could be so much smoke without any fire. Not she! She knew the world!

She was one of those people who fancy they know the world, when they only half know their own shallow rotten hearts. Does a man know a country because he has raked in one of its ditches?

Then our conversation happened to touch on a man who lay in Newgate that Sabbath evening, and who would be led forth next morning to die on the gallows. A dreadful man, whose mad passionate murders were almost the least inhuman part of a godless, heartless, selfish life—but Mrs. Chance had sympathy for him. She declared that some of his letters were beautiful, and that nobody knew to what temptations he had succumbed. She was pathetic on the duty that religious charity owes to such monsters; and then, perhaps noticing that Mr. Ravel sat silent, she turned to him and inquired if they were to expect “darling Fanny” that evening.

“I suppose so,” he answered gravely. “You have taken care of my household for nearly twenty years now, Mrs. Chance; and Miss Fanny Sheldon

has only failed to pay you her Sabbath visit twice, when she was ill."

I felt quite curious to see the woman who could be such a constant friend to this provoking nonentity; but she did not arrive early. Mr. Ravel asked me whether I had ever read a powerful religious book which had just then come out; and hearing I had not, he took it up, and began reading it aloud, in that quiet, unpretentious way which is better than all but the best emphasis. Mrs. Chance sat aside, and picked out the lace border of her pocket-handkerchief. It must have been after evening service that Miss Fanny Sheldon arrived.

Surely, to its uttermost corner, the quiet old house must have known when she entered! It was like a rush of hearty Crusaders into a silent monastery, or the onslaught of the "boys from school" into a philosopher's sanctum. Life is so oddly measured out sometimes. Some crowds seem to have only one share among them—some people have the share of a crowd in themselves. Miss Fanny Sheldon had the crowd.

Do not fancy that I mean she was a noisy, trooping kind of woman. Not at all.

She was quite middle-aged; and one felt sure that she looked older than she was, with that pathetic

age that comes to youth, and encloses it as in a crystal, drying up its evanescent freshness only to preserve its real beauty to the end. She had plentiful hair—almost white—cheerful eyes, and a strong satisfied mouth that seemed to enjoy her own pleasant words. For her dress, it was plain, good, and serviceable, with a bountifulness about it, as if her draper's bills were so safe within her means that she did not require to be exact as to an extra breadth of stuff or another yard of ribbon. Altogether, she gave one the idea of a woman with a large life and a larger heart.

She did not begin to talk about herself or her doings. It was only her frank answers to Mr. Ravel's inquiries which let me know that her life-work ranged from a guardian angel's to that of a maid-of-all-work—that she was equal to saving souls, and not above making beds.

"Any news from Rolt Court?" Mr. Ravel inquired.

"Well, a good deal this week," she answered. "The Blewitts have at last made up their minds to emigrate. Poor Sally Blewitt used to say she'd rather starve in Old England than feast elsewhere. I've often thought that she ought to feel that those who had to keep her from starving had a right to

speak in the matter. But what was the good of saying that to a poor creature, who was really well-meaning, and willing to work if she could? You might as well put things easy as hard. So I've always kept on telling her, quite incidentally, you know, about the young noblemen and gentlemen who have to go abroad to take Government posts, and so on, and how their friends neither grieve nor grizzle, but only think what a fine thing it is for the young fellows. Poor Polly! I used to see this brought quite a new idea to her. And at last she gave in of her own accord: it was the next day after I'd been reading a letter from Ann White, who went last year, in which Ann told how she wore a seal-skin cap and moccasins, and went to church in a sleigh. Says Polly to me, 'Bill and I have made up our minds, miss, and we'll go. I'm sick o' this ere old shawl o' mine, an' it's falling off at last, an' I don't know where the next's a-coming from. I ain't likely ever to get a tuppence to ride on the Whitechapel 'bus, so I might as well go in for the slay, whatever it is.' So the night-school is at work this week on the Blewitts' 'kit,' and they'll be off next. Polly is chief comforter and stand-by to the other women who are going. 'You're a set o' poor creeturs,' I heard her saying yesterday. 'If

you was nobilities and gentries you'd go off with a thankye, and ne'er a grumble.' There now, Mr. Ravel."

"Highly satisfactory," he said. "There is a use in fashion after all, if it can make right things become easy. And what about the others?"

"I've caught Wild Hatty again!" she answered triumphantly. "I was coming up Selater Street from helping blind Mrs. Booth to tidy up her place against her sailor-boy's return, when who should I see, just going into a public-house, and looking as if she'd been too much in one already, but Wild Hatty herself. So I caught hold of her, and says I, 'You've made a mistake, Hatty, you're not going that way—you're coming this.' Poor Hatty was so confounded with the suddenness of it, that she could not help herself, and came away without a word, till I'd got her seated in my own room at the night-school. And then, says I, 'Now, Miss Hatty, I'm as sure that you really want to do well as that I want to help you to do so. But I don't believe either of us quite knows her own part of the business. I can tell you a bit of yours, Hatty, and that is, when you're off the streets and at honest work, as I had you three months ago, don't go prying about where you're likely to meet old



friends, but whenever you feel a longing to do so, go down on your knees, and pray the Lord Jesus to keep tight hold of you, for the devil is tugging dreadfully hard. And now I've told you what you ought to do, Hatty, can't you tell me what I can do for you? I've tried my own best, Hatty. I've given you work, and good food, and neat clothes, and taken you for holidays, Hatty, but I've made a mistake somewhere, or you never would have gone away as you did.'

"‘I won't be talked to,' said Hatty, quite fierce. ‘You're just saying all this to throw up how ungrateful I am. I don't ask you to do nothin' for me. Let me alone. I can get on in my own ways. I saw you lock the door; let me out, or I'll kill you—I won't be kept prisoner by anybody, unless it's the beak.'

"‘Certainly not, Hatty,' says I; ‘and that's just what I've determined you shan't be. You're the devil's prisoner just now, Hatty, and I only locked the door to make you stand still while I cut his ropes.'

"And then for want of a better argument, she stamped her feet with passion, and I stamped mine back again, firmly, of a purpose, which had a deal more meaning in it, and was so comical that Hatty

burst out laughing, and that ended in tears and penitent prayers for another chance."

"She'll only go off again," said Mrs. Chance.

"Then I'll fetch her back again," responded Fanny Sheldon, with a decisive nod. "I'm a tougher woman than poor Hatty. She'll tire before I shall."

"And is everything else going on satisfactorily?" Mr. Ravel inquired.

"Yes, I think so. Except that the Wynns have lost another little one. There is some dreadful smell from the house that stands at the back of theirs—stagnant rain-water, or something of that kind."

"Not one of my houses?" asked Mr. Ravel; by which inquiry I gathered that he held property in the highly eligible neighbourhood of Rolt Court, Leman Street, Whitechapel.

"Oh dear no," said Miss Sheldon. "But I found out the landlord. He has a place of business near St. Paul's, and a villa at Tulse Hill. I went twice to his office about this matter, and then I thought I would take him at his leisure, when his heart was soft among his own children at home. But he did nothing. Then, considering I had done my duty in first exhorting him privately, and then before one

or two friendly witnesses, I set the parish on him. It will be all right by next week. And he'll have to do a deal more than I asked in the first instance."

A servant brought in supper, and during the interruption of setting the wine and sandwiches on the table, I noticed Miss Sheldon's eyes rest on the expressive, rude portrait over the mantel. The look of merry energy did not die in her face, but it changed, like a sunbeam passing from a laburnum-tree to a cedar.

Miss Sheldon and I left together. Our host himself showed us to the door; and as I could scarcely forbear glancing from right to left at the beautiful things we passed, I observed—

"Your house seems full of art-treasures, Mr. Ravel."

"Yes, I suppose it is," he answered, with that sudden gravity of his. "Are you fond of art-treasures, Mr. Garrett? I will show you over the place any evening that you care to look in. You will always find me at home—and alone. Good night."

And the door closed abruptly behind us.

"You live a very active, good life, Miss Sheldon," I said presently. "Surely you are very happy, to be so useful."

“I’m not very useful,” she responded, with her cheerful sincere laugh. “I just go about, and find out things and take notice of people. I always had a turn that way. When I was a tiny girl, living in my old home in Bloomsbury, I used to coax my big boy-cousins to take me to Clare Market on Saturday nights. An odd turn, isn’t it? I was born with it. But I don’t know that it was ever useful in itself. My big boy-cousins used to give me halfpence to buy pudding for the bare-footed children that were looking in at the steamy cook-shop windows. And now Mr. Ravel gives me a great deal more than halfpence to do whatever good I can find out. If I’m useful to anybody, it is to Mr. Ravel himself—for I’m sure I make his money go a great deal farther than he could!” And she laughed, with simple, genuine self-satisfaction. “But you don’t know what a good man he is.” Yet as she said that, there fell upon her face the very shadow which always fell on his.

“Does he go about himself among these poor people?” I asked.

“No,” she said seriously. “I wish he could. I tell him that he makes me feel like a cheat—his money gives me so much pleasure and himself so little.”

"You are a friend of long standing, I think," I observed.

"I have known Hubert Ravel five-and-twenty years," she said; adding simply, "I used to design for La Croix and Ravel. We have only been on visiting terms since Mrs. Chance has kept his house. She was an old family friend of mine, you know. He has shown her great kindness."

"It must be rather a trial to her to live in the City," I said, "when she so dislikes London."

"Dislikes London!" echoed Fanny Sheldon, laughing. "She dislikes it so much that when Mr. Ravel took lodgings at Boxhill for her, while he went on a pedestrian tour in Scotland, she had a touch of yellow-jaundice in less than a fortnight, and came back to Corded-Friars to enjoy the advice of her old doctor in Finsbury Square! When she describes her ideal cottage, with the bees and the birds and the breeze, she keeps a mental reservation that it must be within five minutes' reach of the Quadrant or the Bank!"

And so Fanny Sheldon and I parted, and I went home wondering. I was sure there was more in it than met the eye. I could not read the drama itself yet, but the *dramatis personæ* had in it the elements of strong interest. This wealthy, cultivated man,

living in the barest chambers of his beautiful mansion, starving his full, active heart in the society of that shallow, frivolous woman; and this zealous, eager, affectionate spinster, with that bountiful humanity which is kin to both prince and pauper—there must be some hidden link between these three which had drawn and kept them together. What had made empty Mrs. Chance a friend of heartsome Fanny Sheldon, and how had Fanny Sheldon's friend become Hubert Ravel's housekeeper? And whose portrait was that over the mantel—quite a modern picture—and yet Hubert Ravel had never had a brother?

It was not long before I availed myself of Mr. Ravel's running invitation. I found him, as he had said, at home and very literally alone, for Mrs. Chance had gone to pay a visit, and he had let the maid-servants out for a little walk.

He led me straight into the dining-room. A vauntful man might have called it "the banqueting hall."

I have seen many "show houses," great and glorious, and fit for the state occasions of royalty and rank. I do not mean to compare the house in Corded-Friars with these. It was on a different level—not necessarily a lower one, because the home

was not sacrificed to art, but art brought, in her best mood, to serve the home.

I have not wondered at all, when I have peeped into the shabby studies and slight boudoirs where dukes and countesses take refuge from their grandeur. But the more I saw of this City mansion, the more I wondered why the least ostentatious man need banish himself to that half-furnished back-room, with its ill-painted picture and ordinary china.

Nothing was mere upholstery. I am sure the thick Turkey carpets were older than Hubert Ravel. Some of them, and some of the hangings too, might be almost dated from the time of that grandfather who migrated from Spitalfields to Corded-Friars. Time has hues which no dye can match, priceless hues of its own. You can no more buy them than you can build an old house. Yet—like precious stones and rare lace—few people know their value, and they are put away as shabby, or shut up as relics, instead of receiving the one glory meet for every good thing—that of being honourably worn in its own proper place.

There were pictures and statuary in Corded-Friars, but they did not stare one out of countenance. One could have read one's family prayers,

brought up one's children to be neat and industrious, and taught them their catechism, under the eyes of the quaint Huguenot ancestry ranged on the dining-room walls. One need not have feared one's little girl asking any too-difficult question about grim Madame Ravel, in the peaked cap, and one's sons and one's daughters might discuss together any point in the history of pretty Madame Celestine, immortalised in her bride's dress. There was a mountain scene by Salvator Rosa, too, hanging over the mantel, just where the evening sunshine struck it.

"Look," said Mr. Ravel, opening a drawer, and taking out a coarse old print—"my great-grandfather bought this because it depicted the defile which his people held against the Duke of Saxe. It is the same landscape which is given in that picture from rather a different point. I was very proud when I bought that Salvator five-and-twenty years ago. It had a double value to me."

"And will always have," I echoed enthusiastically.

But the light had gone out of Hubert Ravel's face, and without any response he passed on.

I have said there was statuary. The great, many-cornered house took up much, as its natural right.



as a queen can wear a thousand gems without vulgarity. It had not been gathered promiscuously as the fashion of a season or the whim of a moment had dictated. A "Bacchante" did not insult a "Faith," nor a "Venus" flaunt beside a "St. Jerome." Here were no Bacchantes nor Venuses. Here was indeed the glory of physical strength, the perfection of animal beauty; but it was all a consecrated glory and perfection. At the end of the great hall, beneath the richly-stained window, a "St. George" towered triumphant over the fallen dragon. In an archway of the dining-room stood "Charity," smiling down at the little naked children clinging round her feet. And here and there, just before some flitting shadow, or beneath some winsome sunbeam, stood busts of men whose very mortality is immortal. There was a snowy "Silence" keeping mystic watch among the crimson curtains of the retired library—the "book-room," as Mr. Ravel simply called it.

The brighter, lighter saloons struck me with a sadder sense of desertion than the stately dining-room—the grim Huguenot ancestry seemed in some way to inhabit that; but these would have been such a perfection of setting for a beautiful, happy life, that one was haunted by a ghostly idea of enchantment in

their cold and lonely order. There was something else about them which I did not consciously notice then, but distinctly remembered afterwards, which was, that for this style of apartment, they were already behind the times. An inhabited house, though none of the furniture had been renewed, would not have looked so. There would have been books of the season on the tables, fashionable needlework lately mounted, and here and there, in many a corner, trifles of the period—purchases or presents.

All was faultless, from carpet to cornice. Here were pictures, too, with great names to them—many originals which I had hitherto only studied in engravings. But it was still the home, not the gallery or collection. Even its subtle aroma of the past did not destroy this effect. It was the ghost of a home. Everything was perfect according to its use and kind; but its perfection had been studied in that connection, and not only for itself. It had the secret of harmony—no part was out of proportion to the whole. Just as the ideal strong man is not the acrobat who can balance himself on his little finger, but he who can longest bear most fatigue with least injury; and as the ideal genius is not the poet who cannot remember clean-shirt day, or keep his accounts, but the mighty mind that reaches from

Hamlet to Simple, and returns to its native village to buy unto itself a mansion—so the ideal house is not a muscum of wonders, but a “household”—a place where people can be good and comfortable, and where all order and beauty are brought in for those ends.

“There are only bedrooms above this,” Mr. Ravel paused to say; “but you must come up to the next flat, just to see a statue there.”

It was an angel's figure. But the wings drooped, and the eyelids were almost down. If one could associate weariness with an angel, one would have said that this was weary with long flight. There was an awful peace on the marble face; but yet there was a sadness, too. The sadness was under the peace—the foundation, as it were. The whole was wonderfully conceived and executed. I forgot to ask who the sculptor was, or what name he had given to his work. It came into my mind that just so might look the soul of some immortal, on whose mighty strength God had laid heavy burdens, but who, somehow, had not fulfilled the powers of his nature, but had been caught in the whirlwind of despair, and had rushed to death through the gate of madness, and who now stood in heaven, forgiven indeed, but low in the rank which he should have led, and

yearning, not over his own loss, but over the Love he had disappointed, and the work he had left undone.

The statue stood by a chamber door

"Is that your room?" I whispered.

"No; it is Mrs. Chance's," he replied.

And without another word we turned again to the stairs. We had not gone half-way down before the door was assailed by a sudden hasty knock.

There are knocks and knocks. Those which nobody hurries to answer; leisurely knocks—somebody come to ask how you are, and to chatter away an idle hour; other knocks which set the mistress ringing the bell for the servant, who is already half on her way to answer it.

This knock was one of these.

Mr. Ravel's serving-maids had just come in, and one of them, who was lingering in the hall, had opened the door before we got down-stairs.

It was only Fanny Sheldon.

But Fanny Sheldon not herself. All her bountiful energies concentrated at one point, like a mighty river narrowing towards a cataract. She did not see me, or she did not heed me.

"The man Bentham is out of prison, Mr. Ravel," she began, without one word of ceremony. "He has

come home to his old place in Rolt Court. It is awful to see him. He says he never meant to kill his wife (and I quite believe it), and he says he can't repent, as it will not bring her back. He does not care for anything I say, because he says I don't know what I'm talking about. You must come and speak to him, Mr. Ravel. You will know what to say. You must come. You will be able to make him hear you!"

How should he? Where was his secret spell?

"I cannot—oh! I cannot," he said.

"Yes, you can," she said, "and you will. God means it. It is his way. Here are your hat and coat, Mr. Ravel."

His face was white and set, with the whiteness and rigour of death itself; but he no longer hesitated. Not one word did he speak, except to say—

"You will come with us, Mr. Garrett."

The two hurried off together, and I followed breathlessly. We were soon out of the quietude of Corded-Friars, soon into the glare and hubbub of a rough, busy thoroughfare. On and on we went, threading our way among the jabbering Jews, blustering butchers, and "larking" poster-mongers. Neither of my companions turned to speak to me once during our walk. "I do not

think they even exchanged a word with each other.

We reached Rolt Court itself, a very ordinary court, though cleaner and quieter than most of its surroundings. A few women were whispering at their doors with marked mysterious whispers. One or two dropped curtsies, and others nodded, as they saw Miss Sheldon. They only stared at Mr. Ravel and me. They did not know he was their landlord.

Fanny Sheldon and Mr. Ravel entered one of the houses, leaving me outside. But Miss Sheldon returned in less than two minutes, and we walked up and down together.

"This man killed his wife when he was in a drunken fury," she explained, half absently. "He had not before been a reckless drunkard, but a man who habitually took too much, and this happened the very first time that he went a little farther. Poor fellow! He has a conscience, and he loved the dead woman. He must either learn how to endure his remorse patiently, or this conscience must be scared, and he turned into a very fiend. That is his voice," and she looked towards an open upper window. "Hark to his groans! Well, Mr. Ravel will help him, if anybody can;" and then she turned again, and walked up and down, and was silent.

Why was there sure to be a secret sympathy between this murderer and that kindly cultivated merchant?

We must have waited fully an hour before that upper window was pushed a little higher, and Mr. Ravel looking out, said quietly—

“You two may come in now.”

We could not see his face as he spoke in the twilight, but by the time we had got up-stairs, he had lit a candle. The man Bentham was seated by the fire-place, with his face held very low, but his little child was in his arms, and his left hand was stroking its flossy head, while heavy tears kept falling in its lap.

“Let us all pray together,” said Mr. Ravel.

And we knelt down—Bentham and his motherless baby beside him—and Hubert Ravel prayed.

“O God! Thou hast pity. O God! help us not to shrink from any pain that drives us near Thee, and keeps us there. O God! help us to be thankful for anything that teaches us what we are, and makes us sick of ourselves. O God! Thou comfortest us. Thou helpest us to rear Ebenezers on the places where we stumbled. We can help others up where we fell ourselves. O God! surely we can never again live to serve that self which Thou hast shown

to us in all its loathly horror. O Lord! teach us how to live humbly, and usefully, and well, even with remorse living in our hearts. There is more in life than happiness. Help us to find that, and to follow that, till it shall bring us back to happiness again. Help us to find those whom we can help, even if only by showing the scars of our own wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores, and telling what a wonderful Physician Thou art, and what balm there is in the blood of Jesus. O Lord! O Lord! help us in this our sorest strait and agony, when we cannot even try to undo what we have done, and cannot even pray for those against whom we have sinned! O God! O God! Thou knowest this, for Thou knowest all things. Help us, help us, have mercy on us! Amen."

"God in heaven bless you, sir," said Bentham, as with averted face he held the candle to light us down the rickety stair. "It's one thing to be told there is a way out of a dark place, and it's another ~~to be~~ shown it, bit by bit, by somebody that's got through it. God in heaven bless you."

And Hubert Ravel walked out into the noisy street, with other light than the gaslight, shining strong on his pale clear face. This time he led the way alone, Fanny Sheldon and I followed silently.



Mrs. Chance had not come home when we returned. We went straight to the little dull sitting-room at the back. A fire had been lit, for the evening was chilly. Mr. Ravel drew three chairs round it, and we all sat down.

He sat in the middle, right under that portrait, with its dark eyes and sensitive mouth. He looked up at it, sadly and firmly—looked for a long time—then said, quietly—

“I killed him!”

There was such a might of pain and patience in his eyes, that I could not shudder, even before I thought of any explanation for the words.

“No, no!” cried Fanny Sheldon.

“I did,” he said. “I killed him by the cruellest death of all—death by his own hand.”

(I thought of that sculptured angel keeping vigil on the stairs.)

“I was an only son,” he said; “and I had my tastes, and they were humoured and cultivated. I came into my wealth and independence while I was but a young man. I was proud to feel that I differed from the honest merchants about me, who aimed at villas, and carriages, and diamonds. I fancied myself high above them. I believed I had the right ideal of life. I wanted to accomplish, not the most

but the best that wealth can do. I went among people who could help me to my aim. I learned all that schools could teach me about Beauty and Harmony. All good lessons, only with a deeper meaning that only God can teach. Then, as my ideas formed themselves, I began to be fascinated with what I read of stately houses, built, as it were, 'of noble thought, for noble uses;' of rich, refined men, such as I thought might have saved Chatterton and Otway and Savage. It was but to plan and to begin to execute. Nobody but those who have tried them know what enchanted palaces such dreams are. I lived in them. They shut me in. What matter that my prison was beautiful, it was still a prison from God's pure air and sunlight. These dreams rose, like blinding incense, between me and God's plain commandments.

"I remember you well in those days, Miss Sheldon. I used to see you again and again when you brought your drawings to the counting-house. I remember I noticed once that the colours of your bonnet-ribbon and gown were not in unison. God forgive me for a paltry, miserable sinner !

"There were plenty of people to encourage and flatter me in these schemes of mine. I went here and there. I visited this studio and that author. I

was proud to receive distinguished guests in return, and to display the beauty I had already gathered and to indicate what more I intended.

“Well do I remember the day when my clerk came to me and asked would I look over Miss Sheldon’s last set of drawings, and send her her usual remittance. It was overdue two or three days already, he added, and she had written a little note yesterday asking about it. But I was in a hurry. I wanted to reach Kensington before twilight, to look at some pictures I was likely to purchase. To own the truth, my current banking account was also rather low, for I had just paid for that “St. George and the Dragon” in the hall. So I answered hastily that Miss Sheldon must wait for a day or two—it could make no difference to her. (I thought everybody’s life was as selfish as my own.) And I remember that the clerk brought me some letters that were to go by the Australian mail, which started that evening. O God, O God! forgive me!”

“I remember all about that evening. I concluded my negotiation for those pictures—they hang in the drawing-room now. And I was introduced to one of the wise men of the age” (and Mr. Ravel named him)—“one whose name will live about as

long as any man's now on earth. And he was kindly interested in the rich young merchant, who had thoughts beyond his counting-house, and even strove to realise his dreams of beauty. He spoke much to me, and said many things that were true and grand and inspiring—that tithe of mint and anise and cummin which should crown, but not displace, the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith.

“I came home, and life went on as usual. I believe I sent your remittance in two or three days' time, Miss Sheldon; and I remember that I was dissatisfied with your next designs, and told you that you must take care and do better. And I remember that I took great credit to myself for my patience when your next designs, and your next, were still below your usual merit.

“You came in and out as usual, Fanny.” (I think he thought of her always by her Christian name, and, for once, involuntarily said it.) “I don't remember that you looked sad. You were thinner, and had an overworked expression. I recall that, because it struck me as a proof of the art-precept that while good work is a joy to do, that of inferior quality is a burden and a weariness. I know you were not in mourning.”

“Yes, I was,” said Fanny Sheldon quietly. “I

took the red bow from my bonnet, and put in a black one. It was all I could do."

She leaned back in her chair, throughout Mr. Ravel's narration, and her eyes were closed. No tears trickled below their lids. Only her lips quivered a little, and she breathed hard once or twice. As she sat so, she looked younger.

"Not many months after that, a book of poems was published, written by one William Chance. It was not a book to make a noise in the world, but it was just the book to be deeply interesting to any thoughtful people, and particularly to that high audience of successful men who keep in the secret silence of their own past some such struggle and agony as William Chance's. It was such a man who put the book into my hands.

It fascinated me. The poems themselves would have done that, simple and sketchy as they were—perhaps the more because they were so, for ideas come from God and are genius, and elaboration is man's and is merely art. But the strongest spell lay in the portrait of the poet, and in the brief, stern story of his life.

"He had been an only child, the orphan of a poor Government clerk. His mother had kept little schools in the suburbs of London, and in them he

had got all the education he had, except that he once went for two years, as 'exchange pupil,' to an 'Academy.' He had been a quiet, dreamy lad, naturally left much alone, but with so much true sense of beauty that he could find it in a single tree or a picturesque cottage.

"Throughout the little memoir the few incidents of the poet's life were kept in loving connection with his poems. For he had sung because he had felt, and even his occasionally exaggerated expression was but a true picture of youth's strong agonies as the heart writes them down before its ink has been diluted by many tears!

"Suddenly there came a point where a new strength rushed into the verse. The boy was a man. There was a woman whom he loved.

"His poetry said little of her. The memoir said nothing—except that she existed. But she was in every line.

"There was no word printed from any love-letter. That was all kept between those two and God.

"But they were all so poor! And this was where William Chance showed that there was greatness before him. He did not expect to live as a genius—he did not want to. Laureateships or jesterships in the court or the world did not seem to him the

highest things. He meant to be a man among men.

• “He went abroad. Twenty years ago emigration was more reckless than it is now. Its prizes were higher, and its blanks more. William Chance drew a blank.

“He found himself deceived. There was no work such as he had been led to hope. But he made the best of it, told fair stories in his letters home, and set himself to clear and drain the wilderness. His soul did not fail, then. His body did. He broke an arm, and fell into the marsh-fever.

“He told but little when he wrote home. But there was one, the fire of whose love brought out the invisible facts of his calamity—a true woman, who knew that womanhood is never so sheltered and upheld, as when it is itself a shelter and a support. She sent him help—earned by her own hands. He could take it from her, just as he could take her love.

“But it failed at last. From no fault of hers. The memoir simply said (how I remember the words!)—  
‘From one of those disappointments which are common enough, and only become cruel in their consequences, she was unable to send him the remittance she promised. In her hope of doing so, she kept back her letter till the last moment, and through

some difference of clocks or an over-punctuality of the post-office, she afterwards found it had been too late for that mail.'

"So he was left penniless and comfortless. He was living how he could in a shanty on the border of the bush. Nobody took much notice of him, but one of the woodmen recollected afterwards that he was very 'down' when the mail came in, and said he 'was sure the letter he expected wouldn't have missed unless the writer was dead.' Winter was coming on and the weather was damp and dark, but 'he walked about in the forest a good bit. He talked a deal of nonsense at times.' The fever had touched his head, and he'd never gained strength to get over it. They noticed he did not come in one night, and next morning they found he had hanged himself on a tree.

"That was the history of William Chance. He was buried among the emigrants, and the little memoir only added that his poems were published in the hope of securing some trifle for his mother. .

"I was really touched. But I believe I was growing heartless in my æsthetics, and that it was with a vain consciousness of my rôle of beneficent patron that I wrote to the publisher of the poems, inquiring where I could find Mrs. Chance, to whom I hoped to be of some assistance.



“I got a very prompt answer. They had an appointment next day with the lady who was managing everything for the widow, and who was, in fact, the betrothed of the dead poet. If I would call at their counting-house at a certain hour, I would meet her, and she would give me more information than they could.

“I went, and was received by one of the firm, who entered warmly into the subject. He told me that all the tragedy had been caused by the thoughtless procrastination of the employer of the poor girl whom I was to see. We were both very severe upon him, and I said he should feel himself a murderer. Then he went away, and I was left by myself for about half an hour, when somebody suddenly opened the door, saying—

“‘This is the lady, sir, Miss Fanny Sheldon.’

“Nobody said, ‘Thou art the man,’ but I heard the words, and I fell at her feet as one dead.

“We have never said one word about it from that day till this; have we, Fanny? I was carried out, and carried home. She went with me, naturally enough, as the only woman who was at hand, and also because she owed to our former slight acquaintance.

“She left me when I was in my own home, but

she came again that evening, and finding I was better (like the angel that you are, Fanny!) she led me as near back to my agony as she ever let me go. 'She had heard I wanted to help Mrs. Chance,' she said, 'and indeed she wanted help very much. What did I propose to do?'

"'Let her come and make this her home,' I groaned.

"And Fanny brought her and bade her 'keep the house.' And she has been here ever since. 'I must tell her everything,' I said, 'or I cannot bear it.' 'No, you mustn't,' said Fanny; 'you must take the course that will make her life here happiest, not that which will most relieve yourself.'

"Fanny Sheldon has been my truest, kindest friend ever since, Mr. Garrett. My house stands just as it was that morning. I have learned that one's own duty underlies all other duties, and beauties too. Only Fanny has saved me from utter waste. Her sorrows have opened her life, just as my sin has closed mine. But I can help her to serve others that I couldn't serve. And I thank her for what she has shown me to-night: that we may use our own blackest experience as a rope to keep some other sinner safe in the sympathy and succour of a common humanity."

"That is Mrs. Chance's knock, I know," cried Fanny Sheldon, starting up. "She'll wonder why I'm here, but it's easy enough to tell her the truth, that I came to speak about poor Bentham. Will you move your chair a little, Mr. Ravel, that I may get the wine and biscuits out of that cupboard?"

And so the blessed common light of daily life streamed back upon us, like grey dawn after a night of volcanic eruption. Thank God for common daylight!

And as I walked home, I thought to myself, that the least duty left undone, may become the biggest sin.

And I thought of the old law, and how tender it was, in its simple justice—

"Say not unto thy neighbour, Go and come again, and to-morrow I will give: when thou hast it by thee.

"At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it: for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it; lest he cry against thee unto the Lord, and it be sin unto thee."

And it struck me that, could we but trace the course of our life through this world of intricate circumstances, many more of us, myself perhaps, would also have to pay Hubert Ravel's dreadful "premium to experience."

## VI.

### A GOOD SITUATION.

I AM now going to tell a story, which began in a letter I received from my sister Ruth more than forty years ago. During all the time of our long separation, Ruth and I regularly exchanged one weekly letter. I come upon some of hers sometimes, in all sorts of queer forgotten places—old pockets, flaps of ancient diaries, and so forth. I found this last night in the brown-paper cover of a fly-spitten Ready Reckoner.

The paper is yellow. But the ink was what Ruth herself sold, in the days when she kept a stationer's shop, and so it is as honest and sound as her square, upright caligraphy. And this is what it sets forth :—

“MY DEAR EDWARD,—I want you to meet the Mallowe coach to-morrow. Look up at its dickey, and you will see your old playfellow Rachel Hewett,

who you are hereby requested to hand down and help with her boxes and directions.

"I must explain what brings Rachel to London. Mrs. Hewett is dead. After proving her courage and resolution as a soldier's wife, by picking lint through the battle of Camperdown, and carrying her dying husband—the father of her two-year-old Rachel—off the deck of the *Victory*, the grand old woman vindicated her patience and meekness, by closing her ten years' confinement to a paralytic bed with the cheerful calmness of one who is 'willing to stay, but not afraid to go.' She always asked about you. It was good to see how much interest she took in everybody and everything.

"The mother's annuity dies with her, and the girls are penniless. Not quite. The furniture was sold yesterday, and realised twenty pounds. They have kept their father's old chest, which went with him to all his barracks and men-o'-war; and Rachel has just been made happy by finding that his old rapier, which used to hang over the fire-place, is not too long to put away in the bottom of it.

"They are staying with us, and Rachel will start from our house to London. They both have their own living to get. She soon made up her mind what

she would do to get hers—perhaps it would not have been so easy to help her.

“Rachel only went to school for six months. All the rest of the time her mother taught her. She has had a good deal of leisure for reading while she was tending her mother, who also liked to be read to. So Rachel has read a great deal, and is one who catches the meaning of the author’s heart, though she may mispronounce his words.

“But appreciation of Shakespeare and Milton will not keep one in bread and cheese.

“Rachel has had no opportunity to do fancy-work. Eliza did quite enough for one family. You may lay down a book to light a fire for a cup of gruel, but that interruption don’t suit satin stitch. Rachel has had no accounts to keep, except how ninety pounds a year should support three people—one an invalid.

“It has been Rachel’s duty to tidy the house, and light fires, and make a bed and cook a little, and mend a great deal, to be cheerful and patient, and wise enough to see that this was not menial drudgery, but daughterly duty—not a young, budding life wasted for an old faded one, but a squire-like training of devotion to an old knightly heroine of a mother.

“ ‘I will be a servant,’ says my Rachel Hewett. ‘I may make a good one in time.’ ”

“ She has found a place already, though she has never seen her future master or mistress. Squire Dimsdale knows them, and spoke of her to them. They live somewhere in London, have four small children, and will only keep Rachel. I thought she might have waited for an easier place. She knew she was welcome to stay here. But Rachel says this coming to her, directly she wanted it, makes her think it may be a ‘leading’ of Providence.

“ Miss Vix has just called in, and is horrified to hear of ‘a superior person like Rachel demeaning herself to service.’ There must be something else for such as the Hewetts. Cannot she profess to teach? or at least wait for some appointment where she might call herself ‘a nursery governess?’ Is it not possible to get placed as a companion? Wouldn’t some of her father’s superior officers ‘do something’ for her? there would be so much sympathy evoked by public appeal on behalf of the friendless orphan daughters of one of Nelson’s old orderlies, that they might be provided for all their lives. Eliza Hewett sits aside, heartily agreeing in all of this, and while they prattle I go on writing like a reporter, till on Eliza’s leaving the parlour, Miss Vix finally whispers

• that she would not trouble Mr. Garrett to take care of a servant-girl, and that indeed it is scarcely prudent to bring you two together, for your heart is sure to feel soft to any one from your old home, and Rachel might 'set her cap,'—and 'one doesn't know where it might end, and it would be so very ineligible!' She wants to rouse my sister-in-law's envy, hatred, and all uncharitableness. I snuff her out by answering that I am not such an idiot as to try to make or mar any match for my brother, but that if Rachel thought it worth her while to set her cap at you or any other man, it ought to be the making of him!

"Rachel takes but two out of their twenty pounds' fortune. She thinks Eliza may need money more. I think so, too. For though she will need none while she is here, that cannot be for ever."

"Mother sends her love, and wants to know when you are going to write to her again.

"I am, your affectionate sister,

"RUTH GARRETT."

I well remembered Rachel and Eliza Hewett. They were both about my own age, and had always been familiar guests in our house. Eliza was a pretty, graceful thing, with long curls, who did heaps of crochet, and always knew the fashions. She had



been brought up by a godmother, who kept a cheap boarding-school. I had thought the younger sister, Rachel, a wonderfully clever girl, for did she not know by heart "*Il Penseroso*" and "*L'Allegro*," and could she not discover hidden meanings in *Comus* and the *Midsummer Night's Dream*? It was hard to arrive at my sister's sharp logic that these gifts could not earn bread and cheese, while darning and dusting could. I felt sorry for Rachel Hewett. I had sense enough not to think that any independent labour could degrade, but it seemed to me a waste of power to put such as her to a work which I fancied any ignorant workhouse girl could do quite as well. It seemed hard, too, that her dutiful youth should have shut her life in what seemed to me such dark, narrow limits, when, had she neglected her mother to acquire an accomplishment, she might have been on the high road to competence and position, and even have risen superior to most who would now look down on her.

Next day, the Mallowe coach found me duly in attendance at its booking-office. It also duly brought up Rachel Hewett, with her black chest, a carpet-bag, and a little hamper for me.

I had not seen her for a long time. I remembered her best as a healthy-looking little girl in brown or

drab frocks, with crimped white frills, and abundant short hair pushed behind her ears.

She was quite a woman now. Rather over the middle height, and with a largeness of bone which made her look thinner than she was. She had hazel eyes—that peculiar hazel which goes with dark eyebrows and pale, straight, fine brown hair. If I had not known her, I fancy I should have thought she was a hospital nurse; but perhaps the severe plainness of her mourning dress had something to do with that.

She met me with the old honest frankness. She did not seem to find it at all awkward that I should come to meet her, or that she was going to be a servant. Rachel Hewett was one of those women who take facts unadulterated by fancies. When she was a small girl she had a present of money to buy a cake, and, instead of coveting a sugared one, with coloured paper fringes, she invested in one undecorated, but half a pound heavier. So she could be glad of a friend's welcome without imagining a lover's, and could set such a high value on independence that she did not repine at its price.

She cheerfully accepted my offer to accompany her on her long drive to her destination. As we sat side by side in the cab, she spoke of her prospects in the

family who had engaged her. Its name was Carson,<sup>c</sup> and its head was a captain in a marching regiment.<sup>c</sup> Consequently the household was a wandering one—now in furnished lodgings, now in officer's quarters. Squire Dimsdale's housekeeper had told her a little about it. The Carsons were poor, though there were only two lives—uncles' lives—between Captain Carson and the headship of a rich old county family. In fact, the captain had only his pay, for his uncles would not supplement it by a penny, because his marriage had offended them. They disapproved of Mrs. Carson's family, and disliked her. She had a trifle of dowry, settled on herself, and was in delicate health. "And they want somebody trustworthy to look after the four dear little children," added Rachel.

The street where we stopped at last was a shabby, showy street, very rich in stucco and white-lace curtains. A draggled half-grown lass answered our cabman's knock, and as she opened the door, she let out a confused tumult of shrieks, shouts, and crying. The girl did not seem to have wits enough to comprehend our arrival, and was presently reinforced by a vinegar-faced elderly woman, who querulously asked the cabman what he was dawdling about, and bade him not to mess his feet all over the door-step.

I could not help glancing at Rachel. I expected

• she would be a little dismayed. I should not have wondered had her courage failed, and she had asked me to take her back to the Mallowe coach. But her calm face gave no sign. I knew she used to be a quickly observant girl, but now she seemed neither to hear nor to see. She lifted out the carpet-bag, and refused to put it down where the vinegar-faced woman pointed, asking serenely that she might carry it straight to the scullery, for it had stood in the rain on the coach roof, and would soil the hall-cloth. The landlady snatched it from her with ungrateful sharpness, and bade the draggletail maid "to look alive, and take it down;" but next minute, while Rachel was gone up-stairs with the cabman and her box, she stepped out to take a look round the cab, "to make sure the young person has left nothing behind her," and to indulge in a further aside to me "that this young woman seemed the right sort, only she'd be sure not to stay. The veriest hussies wouldn't put up with Mrs. Carson, let alone a woman that had a value. If they hadn't ha' suited themselves with some kind pretty quick, she should ha' sent them to the right-about, that she would; for their rent wasn't worth them, with the trouble they gave, and their quarrellings, and the four little pickles that were neither to bind or to loose."

Back came Rachel, her bonnet and shawl already thrown aside, and in her hand a fat, dirty, sobbing child of about four. "His brothers were beating him," she apologised, "so I just took him away with me." She had brought out money to pay the cabman, but there I interposed; and here let me record that cabby stood out the distance was at least a mile less than I thought it was, saying, "You needn't be so pertiklar, sir. It's a fine day, and the dull time. Ye're doing the gentlemanly thing by the young woman, sir, and I see how things is. Cabbies has feelin's as well as swells. And cabbies isn't all alike, neither, no more than swells is. I'll get a good fare back from this to the Bank, thank ye kindly, sir."

For I walked back. I had not too much money, and I wanted exercise, and had plenty of time. But often since, on rainy nights or festive holidays, the memory of that red-faced old driver has opened my hand, and saved other cabbies from the necessity of "chaffing" or "bullying" me out of a consideration fee.

And so the door of her servitude closed upon Rachel Hewett. For months I saw nothing more of her. She wrote regularly to my sister, and Ruth sometimes mentioned her well-being in her letters to me, and, in my turn, I occasionally posted to the

Carsons' address such magazines or newspapers as I thought would amuse Rachel's scanty leisure.

At length I myself took a journey on the Mallowe coach. I was to spend a whole month's holiday at home.

I am not telling the history of my own sensations, nor yet of the many households where I was welcomed, almost as if I had grown more familiar in my absence. I am telling the story of Rachel Hewett. And it is mixed with my visit to Mallowe after this wise.

On the second day after my return, Ruth received a letter from Rachel. It was rather short and hurried. The Carsons, who had been settled for an unusually long time, were again on the wing. They were off to Dublin. Rachel seemed to think it scarcely necessary to say that she was going with them. The immediate object of her letter was to ask Ruth if she could do anything for the little lodging-house servant, who was to be discharged on the Carsons' departure, and who was a parish orphan, with no shadow of a home to go to. "She is only a rough little girl," Rachel wrote, "but she does not mind hard work, and is kind and honest. Indeed, I think her particularly affectionate and tractable, poor soul! She has lived in this house longer than

I have ; and though I have often heard her scolded, I cannot say she often deserved it, except for ignorance which she could not help. But what can become of such in London ? If you could get her ever such a poor decent place among the neighbours in our quiet village, where she could get known among respectable people, you might be the saving of a soul and the making of a good woman. I needn't say more to Ruth Garrett."

"I remember the girl," I said to my sister, "and she struck me as a particularly stupid specimen of the genus 'slavey.'"

"I'll take Rachel Hewett's word before yours, my brother," Ruth answered, "especially about womankind. We want a girl in our own house, so we'll have this one sent down."

"But it's a positive sin for a woman who can write letters like your sister's to go and be a common servant," I commented, taking up the epistle, and turning to Eliza Hewett, who was making a lamp-mat.

"So it would be," put in Ruth with quiet sarcasm. "Rachel will be a most uncommon one."

"The handwriting may be a little stiff," I observed, "but much practice would soon correct that, and I have seen worse come out of our City offices."

"And would you have women starved by standing idle till your fine merchants are enlightened enough to employ them?" Ruth asked.

"But she might teach plain English in a school," I said.

"Not as she is my honest Rachel Hewett," Ruth replied. "Look there. She has spelled 'has' 'as.' Rachel knows what she can do and what she cannot, and will not earn her bread by a lie."

"How hard that such a genuine woman should be so set aside by such trifles!" I sighed.

"Is she set aside?" Ruth asked. "I think it is nobler to teach hymns than grammar. I don't know who taught me 'A, B, C,' but I shall never forget that it was our own dear father who taught me

'How doth the little busy bee.'

Rachel will not be what servants are, but what servants ought to be."

"I don't see what scope women of delicacy and feeling can find in such a sphere," observed Eliza.

"That is unfortunate for you!" — said Ruth. "What do you mean by 'scope' — fine dresses, money in the bank, and 'madam' to one's name? Is it not rather to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with one's God?"



Eliza and I were silenced, but not convinced. Eliza gave a little sigh and a sentimental shake of her curls. Ruth has one great disadvantage which all clever people have in controversy with dunces. The dunces think it is not their arguments which are answered, but their own stupidity.

"Is it not something to be so independent that one can help others to independence?" Ruth asked. "Is it not some 'scope' to have the power of setting one young life in good and honest possibilities, as your sister is doing with this Mary Bryan?"

Eliza Hewett threw down her work with a jerk, and spoke passionately—

"I know you've been very kind to me, Miss Garrett," she said, "but for a long time past I have felt that I was burdensome. Life is very cruel to poor women like me. I can assure you, Mr. Garrett, I should think nothing of working twelve hours a day at these bead-mats if I could get a living by it. But, though your sister kindly puts them on her counter, I have only sold one since I came here, and that was to Mrs. Dimsdale, who cheapened it first and then made a favour of taking it. I've advertised every week that I am willing to give lessons in flower-painting, elementary French, and wax flowers, but the only answers I ever get are from other ladies,

who say they cannot afford to advertise for themselves, but who will be deeply obliged if I will give them any surplus orders! I'm willing to do anything. I am most anxious to do something."

"You *must* do something," said Ruth very quietly.

Eliza looked quickly at her. "I know I must not be a burden," she said. "It is very hard to have been so burdensome already. One of the last letters I have had came from a young lady who boards most inexpensively with a dear old widow in Islington. They have room for another boarder, for I asked them, Miss Garrett; which shows you that I had no design to prey on your hospitality. I can go to-morrow?" she said, with the questioning tone of one who wishes to be put off.

"I think it will be best that you should," Ruth answered calmly. "Every day you stay here is another day lost."

"Thank you, Miss Garrett," Eliza replied, with a repressed quiver audible in her voice. "I had better go up-stairs and pack my little possessions at once."

"What a sudden move, Ruth!" I said when Miss Hewett had departed.

"I should have made it long before," Ruth answered, "but while Rachel was in London I did not

want Eliza to go there to worry her. I can bear with her as a stranger better than I could if she were my own kith and kin."

"But what is the poor thing to do?" I asked.

"Necessity must teach her," said Ruth.

"You hear she says she is willing to do anything," I pleaded.

"Except what she can get," my sister retorted. "She wants an easy life, and a genteel life. That is her meaning of what she so concisely describes as 'a living.' She feels sure there must be people who need such a one as a secretary—or a lady companion—or, as she condescended to say last week, 'even to keep offices, with a woman under her.' She has had three chances of situations in different ways of upper household usefulness, but she did not think herself 'strong enough' for one, and the other had a suspicious possibility of menial duties, and the third 'offered only the salary of a scullery maid.' O Edward! it taxed all my self-control not to tell her that 'beggars must not be choosers.'"

Eliza went off next morning. She expressed her gratitude guardedly, like one who had certainly received favours, but had suffered in receiving them.

"I have made an enemy for myself," said Ruth, as we watched the coach disappearing down the

'dusty road. "She does not remember that I took her in, but only that I turned her out. Well, she'll find eighteen pounds will come to an end, even at ten shillings a week."

Two days afterwards the little maid-of-all-work arrived, and I could certainly see small trace of the overdriven neglected slattern I had seen before. She appeared in a neat plain brown gown, with a white muslin cap on her head, giving beauty to her curly red hair. She had a dozen of these neat white caps, Ruth told me. Mary Bryan had eagerly informed her that "Mrs. Rachel had made them all herself, and given them to her 'in a present.'" Mary would have no temptation to make experiments in blond and satin till a year's experience should have convinced her of the superior comfort and economy of these.

Mary Bryan was brimful of the praises of "Mrs. Rachel." Ruth liked to draw these out, for they were as wholesome to the lonely girl as agreeable to us. As for any background of the Carson's household that these praises might incidentally reveal, it was too much to expect a young, ignorant girl like Mary to be perfectly silent on experiences which made up all her history. To ask too much secrecy is generally to lose all. We thought that if we per-

mitted reasonable confidences to be reposed in us, it might save them from repetition in the Dimsdale's servants' hall, where the Carsons were known. The result of our experiment showed us that we had done right. And years afterwards Mary Bryan herself returned to Mrs. Carson's service, and served her loyally.

And having thus explained the medium through which we learned much that we should never otherwise have known, I will drop Mary's interjectional narrative, and tell her story in my own way.

There was no mistake about it. Captain Carson and his wife Florence had made a blunder when they married. She was very pretty, poor thing, with a prettiness of yellow hair and pink cheeks; very winning, too, with her playful wilfulness. But hers were a beauty and a winsomeness that do not wear well.

He had always fancied her the bewitching mistress of Carson Hall. Why should not the young pair live there at once, since both his uncles were old bachelors? But the uncles did not see the force of this. "They will come round if they find we are not afraid of them," said brave Captain Carson, and married in haste, and retired to repent at leisure in the parlours of cheap lodging-houses.

The bride had eighty pounds a year. She had

hitherto lived with an old aunt, and had been free to spend her little income on her "dress"—not understood to include boots or underlinen. But her aunt would have nothing more to do with her, and spent the wedding morning in her lawyer's office, where, it might be reasonably supposed, she was devising alterations in her will.

"But the eighty pounds is all mine to do as I like with," probably thought Florence Carson, and probably the captain swore as much, in his bewildered ecstasy of love.

They didn't do so very badly for the first year. Everything was novel. Florence got her silk dresses and smart bonnets much as usual. She only wished her "horrid old aunt" could see them. But somehow the hardship was, that now eighty pounds a year seemed worth much less than before. Even dresses and bonnets are not much satisfaction without morning calls, and promenades and concerts whereat to display them. Florence Carson pettishly remembered that the "horrid old aunt" had provided these.

Then there came a baby, and a heavy doctor's bill. Yes, Florence Carson's eighty pounds "was all her own, to do what she liked with," but it was absolutely necessary that she should like to pay for what the young father, still able to be merry, called

“baby’s trousseau.” She had a little natural motherliness in her, poor thing. God leaves few women without that. So she did not grudge the twenty-pound note, and delighted in fid-fadding with the funny little garments till—she found she must give up the sealskin jacket she had promised herself! Even then she did not grudge the baby. She only blamed her husband!

Well, perhaps it was hard and cruel of him to have made a wife and a mother and a nurse out of a little creature who, in honest truth, had never professed to be anything but a useless little fairy.

They had no house of their own, poor souls. When Mrs. Carson was snappish, the captain could not go off, quite amicably, to his library, and when the captain was sulky, there was no linen closet for Mrs. Carson to rearrange. They just had the lodging-house parlour, and though, truly, there was the bedroom behind, yet to retire to its firelessness and cane chairs was only to make matters worse, by stamping every difference as a quarrel. Thus, put in much the same circumstances as Bill Smith the navvy, who regularly “does a week” for his wife’s black eyes, I am sorry to say this aristocratic pair did not much excel that worthy.

Three more children came, and no more money.

No more new silk dresses for Mrs. Carson. Indeed, she had ceased to care much for them. We may sink below a vanity, as well as rise above it. Every depth has a deeper.

She had learned at last that she could have no more pleasures that cost money. And she could not make pleasures that saved it. But while there was a fire she could put her feet upon the fender, and a novel from the circulating library was only two-pence a day.

What was the use of mending the torn fringe of a two-years'-old silk? She would wear her hair loose about her neck, as in her old days of luxurious freshness, and what was the use of caring that now it made greasy marks about her dress? It did not matter. Nobody called upon her. If, by chance, some of her husband's brother-officers should look in, she could easily hide all deficiencies under some smart old opera wrapper. Poor Florence Carson!

She went lower still, by-and-by. The days were so long and weary. She never went out, and her husband scarcely came home. The children wore her out, as neglected children always do. Even her interest in the blood-and-steel heroines of her favourite novels seemed to drag her on, as cruelly as if she were a poor, worn horse, yoked to an iron engine.



There was a faintness and hollowness in her very soul.

"You must take something to keep your strength up, poor dear," said one of her ignorant monthly nurses. And Florence Carson took it.

Poor thing—poor thing! No cuttings out of pence from the butcher's and the grocer's bill would ever have accumulated for the purchase of finery, or the procuration of gaiety, but they went dreadfully far towards securing the frightful comfort she had found in her darkness.

It "did her so much good" only to drink three or four glasses a<sup>a</sup>weel, that presently she found she had no relish for her dinner, but could get on quite well with this instead. It made her active enough to look over her old trumpery, and pack up bundles of it to be sold at the marine stores. Boots, too, she found a marketable commodity, especially when scarcely worn. She was always wanting money for boots: the captain thought she must take a good deal of exercise with the children, and wondered for a moment, and then forgot all about it.

Florence Carson would have strenuously denied that she was a drunkard. She never fell down, or smashed china. She only took spirits "medicinally," when she "could not keep up without them;" and

this was a feeling which came often and oftener. "She always knew what she was about," only something made her so languid and heavy, that she never could be about anything.

Sometimes, when her husband had gone out angry, she would wonder what had made her so fractious and contradictory, and even, perhaps, shed a few tears over her "dear Richard." But then the faint hungering feeling always craved for the poison comfort, which made her conscience quite easy again, and decided her that Richard must not be indulged in "foolish fusses about nothing," and left her free to follow the fortunes of sham Richards and Florences to their fictitious ends.

It was to this ruined household that Rachel Hewett came.

She soon saw how it was. Had she not, she could not have been deaf to the gibes and jeers of the lodging-house kitchen. Those parodies of sin and shame she could silence, at least in her presence, but their cause was not so easily destroyed.

She did nothing rashly. She did not take upon herself to lecture and humiliate her degraded mistress. She looked first to her own duty, and to the duty of those over whom she had undeniable authority.

She took upon herself to do the whole shopping for the family. If Mrs. Carson ordered Mary Bryan to run an errand, Mary was to tell Rachel, and she would do it for her. Rachel explained this change to her mistress herself, saying that the lodging-house girl was overworked already, and was therefore apt to stay out longer than necessary, and inconvenience the landlady, and through her the whole establishment.

What she said was over-true on the face of it, but Mrs. Carson's morbid intuition could read more in those grey eyes, and that firm calm mouth.

"Do as you like," she said fretfully. "You'll find you're overworked yourself by the end of the week, and you'll be glad to give it up."

But Rachel never did. Nor was she daunted though she knew that the mischief was still smuggled into the house somehow. She had gained a power over her mistress—the restraining and accusing power of a comprehending, pure nature—a power mighty for good in her wise, merciful hands. The two women understood each other—how one wanted to sin and the other to save. On the one hand it was the old helpless cry, "What have I to do with thee? torment me not." And on the other, the command of ineffable pity, "Come out of the woman, thou unclean spirit."

Rachel never said a word, but Mrs. Carson knew why she lingered and lingered at duties in the parlour, till the captain himself returned to keep unconscious guard over his miserable wife. Rachel could not forbid her mistress to go into the other room and sip the fiery death-in-life, but Mrs. Carson was powerless to go under the observation of those clear, patient eyes. Mrs. Carson knew why Rachel begged her to go and walk in the neighbouring park, with the children and her in attendance. Pettishly as she resisted, she generally yielded at last, if but for a few minutes; though, by-and-by, Rachel's skilful fingers so remodelled the old toilette that the old vanity lifted its head, and felt pleased to drag its brightened plunage to bask in the sun.

But the disordered scrambling lodging-house offered more hopeful fields for Rachel's loving patience. Her methodical head and diligent hand so arranged and lightened the labour, that on Sunday morning it was no mockery for her to ask the landlady "if she wouldn't come with her to church." And on Sunday afternoon Mary Bryan was called up to the children's nursery (it was their bed-room too, poor dears!). Rachel knew many sweet hymns, but she had no musical ear. She had

noticed Mary carolling about the house. Mary must set the tune. And when that was done, as they should be sure to want another by-and-by, Mary might as well stay on, and listen to the Bible stories. And perhaps after the children were dismissed to take their tea with papa and mamma in the parlour, Rachel and Mary would still sit awhile, and maybe have a little profitable talk about Mary's daily life, and all its duties and dangers.

One afternoon their singing brought up the captain. They were singing, "O that will be joyful." He came up softly and stood outside the door. Mary was opposite and could see him, but he motioned to her not to take any notice. She heard him talking about it to Mrs. Carson afterwards, while she was closing the parlour-shutters. He said it put him in mind of his dear mother's ways when he was a child. He wished his mother had lived longer. Mrs. Rachel was a treasure of a woman for the children. Mary Bryan could not tell how it was that her friend was always called "Mrs." Rachel. She thought it was the captain who did it first.

But it was not only on Sundays that the grave, quiet new servant brought a fresh life to the little Carsons. It was every day. Morning and evening

Now, prayers were lisped beside each of the little cots in the nursery. And what the prayers meant was taught by the strange gentle rule that only added joy to mirth, but banished oppression, rudeness, and cruelty. After hearing Rachel's tales about the dogs of St. Bernard, and the dog of Pompeii, and the wonderful collie dogs that count the lambs, and the funny dogs that used to turn spits, Master Charlie left off pulling Ponto's tail. Miss Florry was presently beguiled into learning plain knitting, and instead of whining and aggravating her brothers, produced a nice pair of cuffs for her papa. As for Master William, who went to school and could read, the judicious introduction of a box of picture-letters made him find that it was better fun to teach little Master Hugh the alphabet than even to pinch him. And "between the lights" Rachel romped with the children herself, instead of shutting them up by themselves, as the former servant had done.

"Captain," said his peevish wife, in those early days when she had a lurking wish to get rid of Rachel, "I don't see why we should pay a woman to play blind man's buff and puss in the corner."

"It must be hard enough work when one is so tired as she must be," the captain had laconically

replied. He had already made up his mind that "Mrs. Rachel's" ways were good ways, and must not be gainsaid.

Rachel must have had hard work during her last week in London. She did all the Carson packing, found out and supplied all immediate deficiencies in the Carson wardrobe, and for recreation, stole out in the evening with Mary Bryan to go shopping with the girl, and advise her as to the best way of laying out her little wage. "Mrs. Rachel made a shilling as good as another body's half-crown," said Mary Bryan.

And so the Carson household departed for Dublin. Ruth received one letter dated thence before I left Mallowe. They had settled down in their new quarters. Rachel liked the place, and was charmed with the people. They had already made their rooms look wonderfully pretty—"considering"—and the dear children had all been so good on their journey, and so patient in their sea-sickness. The change "seemed to have done Mrs. Carson good," and they saw more of the captain now, which would be pleasanter for the whole family.

"She lives in sunshine," I said.

"The secret of which is that she makes it for herself," Ruth answered.

So I went back to London. I had been there some weeks, and the bustle of its business and anxieties had put the Hewetts into the background of my mind, when one damp chilly evening, as I sat reading in Mrs. Summers's parlour, my good landlady looked in and announced that "a person wanted to see me."

It was Eliza Hewett. She came in with a jaunty affectation of ease which but ill concealed the shame and mortification which she had grace enough to feel. There was a bunch of bright cheap flowers in her bonnet, their soiled fadedness veiled by a darned fall, but as her foot peeped from beneath her flounced gown I saw a hole in her sodden boot.

"I have been so unfortunate, Mr. Garrett," she explained. "All these weeks I have had nothing to do. With my small means, you may imagine to what straits I have been reduced. However, I do not come here to talk about my troubles. I hope they are over. I have the chance of a situation now. But, unhappily, I cannot take it unless I can make a respectable appearance. And my funds are quite exhausted. In fact, they have been exhausted for some weeks. My landlady has kindly let me stay on in her house. Of course, she could trust my honour to repay her, but still it was kind, and



I fully acknowledge it. I got a little help from Rachel ; but oh, Mr. Garrett, when one is down in the world one learns lessons ! I hope I should have been more liberal if I had been in Rachel's place. She had twelve pounds a year to begin with, and I dare say they have raised it since ; and she started with a stock of serviceable clothes, and has been in her situation nine months, and has everything found, and requires to make no appearance, and can have no need for money at all, and yet she only sent me five pounds ! And you can't think how money runs away, even living in the miserable way I do. I declare I think it is dearer to be poor than to be rich. I've had to spend so much in omnibus fares, going here, there, and everywhere after something, and never finding anything. I never was a good walker, and it was no use exhausting my small stock of strength over nothing. I've had to walk lately, though, and it is telling upon me frightfully. Then I gave two or three half-guineas to people who professed to teach nice little handicrafts to gentlewomen for that small fee, but though in one or two cases they really did teach me, they never had any work to give after I had learned. How was I to know that ? What can one do without an adviser ? Ah, Mr. Garrett, poor

‘helpless, unprotected women were never meant to fight a battle with the cruel, hard world!’”

I scarcely knew what to say. It was plain enough that she wanted pecuniary help, but that is an awkward thing to offer. I thought it best to observe—

“But you have a chance of settlement now?”

“Ah, Mr. Garrett, and that brings me back to my point. Ah, Mr. Garrett, little did my dear godmother think what would be the fate of the beautiful necklace and pendant which she gave me. Ah, Mr. Garrett, we none of us know what we shall come to. Once, I seemed as far from this as you do now, Mr. Garrett. That ought to teach us all to have pity and fellow-feeling. It was when I was very badly off, and the landlady was not quite sure I had got through all my money, and she was threatening me dreadfully in the hope of bringing out some more—she’s been kinder since. I took my dear godmother’s gift to the pawnbroker’s, Mr. Garrett. They’d only give me two pounds on it, and it was worth ten when it was new, and it’s none the worse for wear, and the fashion’s coming up again.”

She spoke breathlessly and shrilly, then suddenly dropped her voice and asked persuasively—

“Will you buy the ticket for two pounds?”

"No," I said decidedly, "but I will let you have two pounds, and you can leave the ticket with me to ease your mind, and make you feel you have given security. But as soon as you can spare the two pounds I lend you, send for the ticket and redeem the necklace, and I will wait your further convenience to repay me."

"O how good you are!" she said gushingly. "You are a true friend, Mr. Garrett. And now you must just let me fully explain my position, and why I have needed to borrow this money. I am to be companion to a lady. She is a lady by birth, and has large property, but, poor dear old thing, she is a widow, and her relations have shown themselves so unkind and mercenary, that she has got into the habit of living in the quietest and closest way. She gives me a very small salary—very small indeed: but though she has a queer manner with her, which some people might think was sarcastic, yet she spoke very nicely to me, as if she made sure I had some private means of my own. 'There must be a salary between us, Miss Hewett,' she said, 'to quite settle which is the mistress. But the smaller it is the less you will feel like a servant. Servants are so independent, I can't endure them,' she said. But of course she will give me presents of clothing, and she

will be sure to leave me a legacy or an annuity, or something. It is as good as a provision for life, Mr. Garrett. And nothing to do, except what any lady does in her own home. Only, you can quite understand, I have one or two little expenses before I can go to her. I could not walk out with Mrs. Churton in a bonnet like this, and of course I should like a few shillings in my pocket."

"But you owe something to your sister and to your landlady too, do I not understand?" I inquired.

"Rachel can wait," she answered; "that is the least that Rachel can do. And as for my landlady, she is really a good soul. As I am fairly off, she says I need not trouble myself about the trifle of back debt. Isn't it kind? Of course, as I tell her, that does not relieve me from paying her—she can trust to my honour for that—but it eases me from present pressure. And you won't forget that I have given you ample security for your generous loan, will you, Mr. Garrett? And now I must say good-bye, and waste no more of your valuable time. Only, may I ask that when you write to Miss Ruth, you will inform her that I am very glad I did nothing rashly, for I have obtained just the lady-like, comfortable situation which I wanted."

And so she went off. As Mrs. Summers let her out, I heard her speaking to that good woman with patronising volubility. And I carefully put away the pawn-ticket, a strange treasure to store among my poor mother's letters and my own innocent weekly bills.

It was never redeemed. Eliza did not communicate with me again until two days before the pledge would be forfeited, when I received a piteous letter begging me to make the advance necessary to save it for another year. But I understood the woman by this time. And perhaps, man-like, I could be sterner by letter than in person. For I wrote her a cold note, telling her 'that if she had not thought it worth while, during ten months' opportunity, to earn or husband two or three shillings' interest to secure a family relief, she could scarcely expect a stranger to do so.

I did not daunt her effectually. By return of post, I received an epistle covering four sides of paper and crossed. She was miserable. In all her life she had never been so deceived as in accepting a situation with Mrs. Churton. She was a grasping, unfeeling old miser (underlined). She expected Eliza to be lady's-maid, housekeeper, and courier, all for ten pounds a year and left-off silk gowns that

would not fit her (three notes of exclamation). She was degraded to comb the dog (capital letters). Worst of all, she had appealed to Rachel to advance a trifle to enable her to leave Mrs. Churton, and try her fortune again, and Rachel had been brute enough to say that she could do nothing for her, except to advise her to stay where she was, and make the Best of it, till she saw an opportunity of bettering herself (liberal expenditure of capitals, exclamations, and underscoring).

But I remained unmoved. I wrote back that there was a best as well as a worst to every position in life; that dirty water should not be thrown away till we had secured a clean supply; that Rachel was right in her denial and her counsel; and that I only wondered Eliza had no more sense of honour and consideration than to prey upon a sister who had already given her every advantage and taken none, and whose very power to help, limited as it was, had only been acquired by that wisdom and self-abnegation which Eliza had despised and repudiated.

That closed our correspondence.

Ruth heard regularly from Rachel. Her letters might be short, but there was always a something in them which made them worth reading. She never gossiped about the Carsons. Once there was

an unusually long interval between her epistles, which she afterwards explained as having been a season of family trial and affliction. There had evidently been both sickness and sorrow, and all Rachel's straightforward brevity could not conceal (perhaps to our rather enlightened consciousness) that there had been features of peculiar pain in the suffering. It had not been penury. For the captain had just been promoted, and could now afford such other household assistance that Rachel was free to devote herself henceforward to personal attendance on "the dear children" and her "lady," the latter evidently requiring a great deal just now, having clearly borne the brunt of the mysterious storm.

Several of her following letters came from little seaside villages where she was staying with Mrs. Carson, alone—even the presence of the children being too much for the mother's weak state. Some of the first seemed a little doubtful as to the future, but they presently cheered up. "Mrs. Carson was regaining strength and spirits; by-and-by, she would be a healthier woman than she had been for years."

"I can guess," said shrewd Mary Bryan, who was still in my sister's service. "Mrs. Carson has broke out bad at last, and the captain has found it out, and

then Mrs. Rachel has got her to take the 'pledge.' The Lord of glory be about her to bless her, for a patient angel as she has been."

That conjecture was all that we had to go upon for years and years. We heard that Mrs. Carson returned to her family. That "she had become strong enough to take happy and active interest in the education and amusements of her growing family." That there were more visits paid and received. That the captain got an appointment on the Viceroy's staff, which settled the household in Dublin. That in due time a governess was engaged, and a tutor came to give lessons, until at last Master William and Master Charlie were "entered into Trinity," and "looked such handsome lads in their caps and gowns—dear good boys too, both of them."

By-and-by they all crossed the channel on a visit to the family seat, Carson Hall, Cumberland. One of the old bachelor uncles was already dead, and the heart of the survivor so softened towards his nephew and heir, that to enjoy his long-lost society he was actually willing to tolerate the presence of his despised niece-in-law.

She must have changed very much from the frivolous light-minded girl who had been so dis-



tasteful to the grave old squire. For Rachel gleefully narrated—

“Two days before we came away, Squire Carson brought down an old carved casket, and handed it to my mistress, saying that it held the Carson jewels, and that as there was nobody to wear them before her, she need not wait her turn till he was in the grave, adding that he had never looked at them since his sainted mother wore them, and he should like to see them on her, if she would please an old man’s fancy, and wear them that evening at dinner. And so she did, though in a general way the diamonds are far too grand for a simple family party.”

They went back to Ireland, but within a year of their visit the old uncle was gathered to his long rest, and they returned to Cumberland to take up the dignities and responsibilities of the Carsons, or Carson Hall.

Rachel was to be housekeeper. “It frightens me a little,” she wrote, with the playful affectation of a person who is not frightened a bit. “Fancy having to order about two footmen and five maids, and to be responsible for airing the linen of fourteen bedrooms.”

Little incidental hints gave us pleasant glimpses

into the ways of life in the stately old mansion. In one letter it might be some allusion to—

“Our family prayers in the dining-room.” In another, some explanation “as we have no cooking on Sundays.”

Or, “Master William has had a young divinity student from Oxford visiting him. He is an orphan, and was brought up in the Blue-coat School, and is delicate, but our fresh air and new milk has quite set him up.”

Then, “Miss Florry’s old governess is now staying here. Poor dear lady, her eyes are failing for books, but she can still play and sing so beautifully that Mrs. Carson is trying to persuade her to live here most of her time, her music is such a treat to her and the master, Miss Florry having no turn for it.”

Again, “We had grand doings here last week. Master William came of age. There was a garden party of the tenants, and fireworks in the evening. But what do you think I found on my table that morning? A beautiful little gold watch, and such a good note from Master William, addressing me as his dear friend, and saying a great deal that was very pleasant to me to hear.”

At last, “I think our young vicar will soon be

carrying off Miss Florry. He has only his living, but is as good as gold, and that is what the master will care for."

That was soon followed by an announcement which came to Ruth with a little piece of cake in a white silk box (and I got another in London).

"The wedding is over. Miss Florry looked so pretty, and was so good, with her little face quivering with the tears that she would not shed for the bridegroom's sake, and because she wanted to help her mamma to keep up, for it is still a going from home,—though, thank God, not going far. Miss Florry said herself that I was to send cake to all my friends, and especially to both of you, of whom she has heard so much. She says she loves you for my sake, so that perhaps you will care a little bit for her. I gave her a white knitted garden shawl, that I'd been working on of evenings for a long while, and she would put it on the side-board among all her grand wedding-gifts. They would have me sit down at the wedding-breakfast, and when I said I was afraid 'some of the visitors' might not like it, Master William, who is rather outspoken, said, "then they might lump it, but he did not think they were such fools." And the master gave me a grey satin gown to wear on the occasion, and put me in at the end of his speech."

The Squire-Captain lived long enough to see his youngest, once the little dirty fat sobbing Hugh, grown a fine young man, passing through his college curriculum "with honours." Then Squire Carson died, after a very short illness.

We received a Cumberland paper with all the details of his interment, funeral sermon, and testamentary arrangements. It was not directed in Rachel's hand, but was probably forwarded to us by some of her subordinates.

Immediately after the settlements upon his own family, the captain's will bequeathed a gift of fifty pounds and an annuity of the same to "our faithful and valued household friend, Mrs. Rachel Hewett, on whose behalf I need scarcely express the wish that she shall always have a home in Carson Hall, as long as she shall wish it."

It was ten years after Mr. Carson's death that Ruth was startled by a quiet little brougham driving up to her shop-door, from which alighted a pretty Sèvres-china-like old widow, and Rachel Hewett, bright with the healthy bloom of a sturdy evergreen.

They were making a visit in a small town not far from Mallowe, and had driven over expressly to see my sister.

"Your good friend belongs to me altogether

again," Mrs. Carson said; "my son says that somebody else can take care of the jams and jellies, but Mrs. Rachel is to take care of me."

"Yes, Miss Garrett," Rachel laughed, "they have put me on the shelf at last, and I must just play the granny in the servants' hall."

Mrs. Carson gave her delicate little head a thoughtful shake, and looked wistfully at my sister. Ruth said she had wistful eyes, glad and yet sorry, like a naughty child's, who has asked forgiveness and got it.

"She would never tell you so herself," Mrs. Carson whispered; "but your good friend, Mrs. Rachel, saved me for this world and the next. Talk about the angels that visited men of old! They come to us yet. Thirty years ago, we hired one at twelve pounds' wage! God bless Rachel Hewett!"

While Mrs. Carson was "twittering" to Ruth's canary bird, and hovering over her ferns, Rachel took my sister aside to say a few words about Eliza, of whom we had heard very little since the episode of the pawn-ticket.

The miserly Mrs. Churton had lived long—seeming to derive vitality from her spiteful delight in the thickening grey hairs of her expectant nephews and nieces. When she died at last, she left all her

money to a sister, twenty years younger than herself. The two had quarrelled mortally, and had not spoken for ages; but after all, bitter Mrs. Churton had liked her not less than her other kindred, and had probably come to the cynical conclusion that it would be best to leave her wealth to the rich half-paralyzed old woman that wanted it least. Not that I suppose even the sour old miser put it to herself as plainly as this. Perhaps she framed her conclusions that "her sister was nearest after all,"—and "that as 'her people' never left their money out of the family, it was right it should go first to the closest." Deeds of envy, hatred, and uncharitableness wear another name to the heart from which they issue.

Not a penny was bequeathed to Eliza Hewett, and she had been fain to accept the still harder service of her dead mistress's kinswoman and successor. But by the time Rachel Hewett revisited Mallowe, Eliza's health had become so broken down by fidgets, slop diet, and want of healthy exercise, that she was only too thankful to take refuge in a small, poorly-endowed almshouse in the north-east of London. It gave her house-room, and a small dole of money, which I afterwards found that Rachel liberally supplemented.

“But she is very dull there, poor thing,” Rachel told my sister. “She has not the happy knack of making herself at home anywhere. I wonder if your good brother could possibly make it convenient to look in upon her. A visit would be a godsend.”

When my sister transmitted this petition I did not refuse it. I went to see Eliza one Sunday afternoon, knowing that is often the eeriest time for the lonely. I had some difficulty in finding the place. The charity was of very ancient foundation, and in its earlier days had doubtless been airier and more lightsome. Now it was simply six cramped cottages packed into a narrow court overhung by great high smoky factories, and shut in by a rusted gate surmounted by the founder's arms. But a very comfortable-looking old woman, wrapped in a great shawl, was standing just inside the gate, deeply interested in the reward books and school gossip of a group of children. Her cheerful, rubicund face, conveyed assurance that life could be very happy even in “Dame Wither's Charity.”

This cosy old lady directed me to the tiny heavy-browed room where I found Eliza Hewett. • Eliza said she was pleased to see me, “but she wished I had come on any other day but Sunday, for then the Charity was quiet, and she generally passed the

time away in a nap, which was impossible on other days, because the 'old women' encouraged children about, playing and making a noise. But now I had come, of course I would stay and take a cup of tea—at least, if I thought her tea was good enough for me to drink."

This is a fair specimen of her conversation. Poor thing! she did not need even to open her lips to announce that she was miserable. The fretfulness and anxiety of a selfish nature had come out in capital letters on the once pretty, sprightly face. "O my dear, bonnie young lasses, while you are carefully avoiding freckles and warts, do not forget to take heed lest self-will and petulance and discontent are writing secret lines on your fair faces, which the hot fire of Life will bring out black and strong. A young girl's beauty is the promise of what she may be, but an old woman's loveliness is the seal of what she has been.

Everything was wrong. She should like any other house in the Charity better than her own. She should like any other almshouse better than the Charity. She did not like the parish clergyman; he spoke too low. She did not like the Independent minister; he spoke too fast. There was no nice walk near for an old woman. The High Street, at



one end of the Charity, was too crowded, she thought she should be knocked down; the squares and lanes at the other were too dull, she might as well sit at home as go there.

"Yes," she "supposed Rachel was very good to her. She sent her money regularly—she could not well do less when she had been so fortunate. Some people had a silver spoon in their mouths. Folks used to say that she was the lucky sister, being the prettiest, and getting an education from her god-mother. But it had been a different tale for many and many a long year now."

I did not want to be hard on the poor, broken, failed old woman, but I saw she was so miserable in her bitter rebellion against God and her fellow-creatures, that I thought I might soothe and soften her if I could gently lead her to see that some blame, at least, attached to herself.

But no: I found it impossible. It was Fate. It was Rachel's luck. Could I say it was her sister's merits that had got her such a good situation with kind and rich people?

"It was a situation which you would not have taken," I pleaded. "She took it in her brave determination to be independent and useful. What God had sanctified as duty she did not call common

and unclean. What her hand found to do, she did with all her might. She knew that the tasks and troubles of daily life are the stones with which to build one's life, and where some would have reared a pigstye, she has reared a temple. Labouring to bless others, others have risen up to call her blessed."

"Well, I could not have been a common servant," was Eliza's only observation. "A sort of drudge of all-work, she was, at first. I had more pride in myself."

"Rachel recognised it as her duty," I urged. "If we don't do what we don't like, we must not be dissatisfied if we don't get what we do like. God's precepts go before his promises. Those must be obeyed, before these can be fulfilled. If we won't lend our principal, we can't expect interest. The man who wouldn't crack the nut must not grumble when his neighbour gets the kernel."

It was all of no use. As it happened to be a damp evening I sent for a fly when I was leaving, and Eliza's parting words were that "it was well to be a rich man like me, who could go about in cabs." I never saw her again. She died shortly afterwards.

Rachel lived much longer. But with that old letter of Ruth's with which I began this "Experience," I

intend to store the Cumberland newspaper in which we read of the death of—

“Rachel Hewett, aged 64, after forty years of faithful service and devoted friendship in the family of the Carsons of Carson. ‘A city which is set on a hill cannot be hid.’”

Good-bye, dear Rachel. That text tells the secret of your “luck.” You walked in God’s ways, and God was with you. You forgot yourself, and remembered Duty. And what is forgotten God recollects, and wherever you had been would have become a Good Situation. c

## VII.

### AN ISRAELITE INDEED.

OUR rector, Mr. Marten, my sister Ruth, and I, have just had one of our frequent discussions. It began by Mr. Marten applying the term "Puritanic" to something which he was censuring as dismal and austere.

"I use 'Puritan' as a term of honour, sir," said my sister, in quite her serene-highness style, which the rector playfully says, "takes your mind's hat off for you."

"Pardon me," responded Mr. Marten, "I, too, honour Puritans as men who held high our country's best banner in very bitter battles. I only join issue with them as to their wisdom in setting the boundaries of life so very high and narrow."

"But suppose that was the training which gave them their strength in the combat?" Ruth argued. "Suppose a little wider here, meant a great deal weaker there?"

"I cannot believe that God means us to walk silent in sombre clothes in his world of flowers and sunshine," observed the rector.

Ruth laughed. "The Puritans were not silent," she said. "Is any merry, let him sing psalms,"—and the Puritans were singularly noted for psalm-singing. As for sombre clothes, they were plain and good, the very ideal of dress, though most of us banish it now to servants and nurses. • They are pretty, too, to my eyes. When I was in London, I was always taken with the City charity girls. Their costume is a masquerade now; but when I saw them beside the be-frilled and be-flowered national school children, I only thought that was the greater pity. Remember, it was a Puritan who gave us the finest work of pure fancy in the English language,—the "Pilgrim's Progress." Remember, too, how much of the best genius which blossoms in the world, still has its roots down in strong, solid Puritan soil. It was the Puritan blood in him, and the Puritan home of his boyhood, which made Robert Burns, with all his falls and follies, so much more of a man than George, Lord Byron."

"What I complain of in Puritanism is, that you cannot keep ordinary human nature at such strain, and that the very effort to do so is apt to end in a

dangerous rebound," said Mr. Marten. "Witness the out-flow of levity and irreligion after Cromwell's death and the Stuart restoration."

"Ah, there you speak truly," Ruth answered. "There the Puritans made their great mistake. Such rules of life can no more be imposed upon common humanity than the delicacies of court etiquette could be expected from the natives of Whitechapel. Besides, as incumbences, plastered on from the outside, they are worth no more than rouge on a cheek,—while as the outward expression on the inner life—the bloom of health as it were—they are priceless. I do not argue that in all their strong pure severity they are meant for everybody. I do not commend the Puritans for consigning to perdition all who could not walk in their own high, narrow paths. On the contrary, I say, that when they did so, they yielded to a temptation from Satan. They were meant for the ideal of religious life, not for its minimum standard; and whenever they lost humility and grew despotic, they lost themselves and betrayed their cause. Their strictness and self-denial and austerity were only wholesome as the fruits of love and wisdom,—when they grew from vain-glory and hatred, they became poison-plants."

"Then you believe there is some innate good in asceticism?" said the rector.

"Don't call it by a word that has had and deserved hard usage," Ruth replied; "and don't say that I am preaching dangerous and Papistical doctrine. And yet I will say, that even the perverted and mistaken asceticism of the Romish church is one of the main sources of its strength and vitality. But I only want to declare that in a world which is full of evils to be combatted, or in old-fashioned Scriptural parlance, of 'devils to be cast out,' the highest authority teaches us that there are some that 'can come forth by nothing but by prayer and fasting,' which, of course, we know to mean a general crucifixion of the flesh, and a determined pulling up of the seeds of self, even though some might bring forth very pretty weeds. Your general rank and file of an army may be ordinary citizens, but your keepers of the pass of Thermopylæ must be the bred aristocrats of hardness, endurance, and self-abnegation. And believe me, there are many passes in God's kingdom which sorely need such warriors."

And there I left my sister and the rector talking together, and stole away to record my "experience" on the subject of their argument.

Do you know Gunner's Row, reader? I do not

'suppose you do, for it is not engraved on any visiting cards, nor yet does it haunt charitable appeals or police reports. •It is not a mushroom street: 1700 was in its teens when the last house of Gunner's Row was built. It was a highly respectable street then, never aristocratic or fashionable, but very snug and affluent. Manners and customs were different in those days, and the highest class of tradespeople lived with their trades, and had a genuine rank of their own, and not a bad imitation. Gunner's Row was a nucleus of those neat, profitable manufactures which can be carried on in quiet back workshops or fitted parlours, without inconvenience or disparagement to the family rooms above. It had a nationality of its own too, which was decidedly Scotch, with just a faint infusion of German. Once upon a time there was a Presbyterian chapel in Gunner's Row, very small, very close, and very inconvenient, but with every one of its narrow seats duly rented, and each of its collections highly satisfactory to the good old bachelor minister, who lodged in the first floor over the lapidary's, and went out to tea on, at least three eyenings in every week.

But even when I first knew Gunner's Row, more than thirty years ago, it was Ichabod—its glory



had departed. The steady old tradespeople had gone; some having developed into firms that strike root in Cheapside, and blossom in villas at Norwood or Kew; while others had died out into female members, with enough to live on in the Three per Cents. There was no lapidary, gold beater, bookbinder, or organ-builder left in Gunner's Row. But in each floor of each dim mansion dwelt tailors and boot-makers, and even mangles and monthly nurses. The Presbyterian chapel was turned into "Gunner's Hall," hired by wandering minstrels of no musical or other repute. The Scotch names were departed, replaced by Irish. It was verily Ichabod—all the more Ichabod because it had never been an aristocratic or fashionable place. A court-dress in Monmouth Street would not be half such a pitiful sight to see there as a decent matron's plain Sunday satin. Alas! alas!

But one Scotch name at least remained. It was a Scotch woman who was my friend in Gunner's Row, and with whom I often took a social cup of tea behind the knitted curtain and nettle geranium, which screened that bulging window, which had once been a shop-front. Over that window still lingered the name of Heriot.

I will tell her story just as I knew it, only arrang-

ing chronologically the scraps which fell incidentally from her lips.

The Heriots had been bookbinders. James Heriot, the father, had come from Edinburgh to settle in Gunner's Row, bringing with him a little daughter of ten or twelve years of age. He also brought a Scotch woman to be his housekeeper, who presently engaged a Scotch "lassie" to work under her, while her master, without any particular animus, but simply in the way of natural introduction and national good-feeling, presently found his workshop filled by Scotch journeymen. He kept a front pew in the gallery of the Presbyterian chapel, which was always open to and regularly occupied by his dependants. James Heriot was an open-hearted man; and who was so likely to drift into his wide hospitable living-room, as his Scotch neighbours and fellow-worshippers who could join in the Scottish psalms of his family worship, and take interest in the local gossip of his Scotch newspaper. And so it came to pass that little Miss Jean Heriot, in the heart of London, lived in a Scottish colony, and knew little more of the aborigines about her than does a Melbourne girl of the "black fellow" in the bush.

I think life must have flowed smoothly and pleasantly in the bookbinder's house in Gunner's Row—

smoothly and pleasantly as a summer sea. Those grand old folks who never go to a play, nor even pay a Sunday visit, do generally seem to extract an uncommon share of peaceful happiness from existence. The sheer saving of money and nerve-power may go for something, but the habit of stern self-denial goes for much more. On Sundays the Heriots studied their old covenanting folios, and listened to their long Presbyterian sermons, and read the Bible in the afternoons, verse about, master, daughter, house-keeper, maid-servant, and apprentice, and recited the "Shorter Catechism with Proofs," and had a best garment kept for the sacred day, and a fruit-pie to finish off the cold dinner. And, what with the delight of hearing the master read and the apprentice stammer, what with the pleasure of the dainty clothes and the sweetness of the tart, Sunday was always an interesting day to the Heriot household. A pitiful, human interest truly, say you; but that is the most that human hand can give to divine things, and God's own Spirit alone can add more.

But years passed o'er the bookbinder's house, and Gunner's Row began to sink. The old inhabitants moved away, one by one, and the great houses failing to secure new tenants, were let out in tenements. The bookbinding business went down. A cabinet

minister wrote a notable book, and an upstart firm contracted to bind it on cheaper terms than James Heriot, with his old-fashioned notions of justice towards his workmen, could dream of offering. I am quite sure that the old granite Scotchman made no complaint to anybody, though he knew well enough this was but the beginning of the end. And when neighbours used to drop in, with warm sympathy and clamorous denunciation of "new-fangled" ideas of competition, Jean Heriot never remembered her father going beyond shaking his head and saying,—“It's a lang while sin' Habakkuk's time, sirs, an' I dinna ken if they used the word 'competition' in Hebrew, but I trow it was what the prophet meant when he said, 'Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his. Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high.'” The Hebrew prophets were as fortresses to James Heriot. In them he found reflected his own strong consciousness of crookedness in a world where “a churl is called liberal, and an unjust man said to be bountiful,” while they also gave vivid and beautiful utterance to his faith in that coming kingdom where “the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.”

Jean, and nobody else, was her father's house-keeper in those days. What with death and removal, their visitors had become few, and, perhaps Jean might have felt it a dull life, for a bright young woman, but that she found an absorbing interest in planning to maintain old household comforts at half their former expense. As James Hériot had never made haste to grow rich, so neither did he make haste to grow poor. It must have crept on something after this wise. At first there was only no more money added to the little store in the Bank. Then Jean would remodel old dresses and buy nothing new. Then, though the joint was as good, and the vegetables as excellent, Jean cooked the dinner with her own hands. Next, she took upon herself to sweep the rooms. And, as the old journeymen one by one fell off, no new ones were hired in their places, till finally, Jean suggested that the house was too large and too lonely for their two selves, and they withdrew into the parlours and the first floor, and let off the chambers above.

But it was in the beginning of those days of gradual but sure decay, that old James Hériot had extended his hospitality to the only kinsman he had in the world. Archibald Hériot was only a year or two older than Jean, and she was but five-and-twenty

when first he came to Gunner's Row. But years afterwards there was honest pride in his cousin Jean's voice as she told me that he was even then a ship's master, and had been all round the world. Somewhere at the other side, he had met such a procession of yellow fever, cholera and ague, that what of him remained to return home was glad to find rest and shelter for a while in Gunner's Row. It was for a good long while. He was thoroughly shattered, and his whole moral nature was still quivering with the memory of a day when he made up his mind that he should never see England again, and that there was nothing for him but to die in his bunk, and be dropped overboard into the loathly sea that seethed round his vessel, becalmed in the tropics. He remembered how the old psalms had echoed back to him then, and how he yearned towards the neglected little Bible that he believed was safely stowed away at the bottom of his locker. He had not then dared to resolve, "If I should recover,"—but he had thought, "O how different I would be!" All the diversions and amusements for sake of which the gay sailor had hitherto tolerated the drier parts of life, had suddenly shrivelled into nothingness, like fallen leaves under a frost. Life came back at last, but he was still leaning on a staff

when he walked from the docks to Gunner's Row, and James Heriot did not know him when he first came in, and his cousin Jean, as soon as she had set refreshment before him, went up-stairs to her bedroom and cried over the pitiful change in the bright young lad.

But on Sunday they took him between them to chapel in triumph, and, at Archibald's own request, the old minister returned thanks for one who had been preserved from great outward dangers and brought to a serious sense of his spiritual perils. Touched with that beautiful reverence which old-tried warriors of the Cross always feel for the new recruit, James Heriot loved to lead his cousin to talk of all his strange experiences, delighting to find new spiritual analogies in the lore of those "that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, and see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep."

And from Jean's own narrative, I could gather that these grave conversations were often relieved by lighter colloquies with herself. "He had brought her home shells and divers barbaric rarities, and I have no doubt he found her full of an active and healthy curiosity about the outer world, which proved how little her solitary life had hurt her

mind. They would talk for hours about geography and natural history, and even navigation, the conversation thrilling all the while with her warm-hearted consciousness of his late deadly danger and recent conversion.

Health came back to Archibald Heriot. And presently, there also came a strange restlessness. He went to church as punctually as ever, and never absented himself from the family devotions. But he began to question if life in Gunner's Row was not fenced in by too narrow limits. He began to feel that a Christianity which did not forbid a visit to the theatre or a neighbouring "hop" on a winter evening, would be a great deal easier and pleasanter to him. I dare say he broached these questions very gently to Jean, but she was nearly startled out of her wits, and only clasped her old standard the closer, as a loyal subject does whenever treason is in the air. He did not mention these subjects to James Heriot for a long time. But somehow, presently, Mr. Heriot was not quite so satisfied with his young relations as he had been. To him, Archibald seemed full of symptoms of that warped charity which hopes good in apparent evil, and suspects evil in apparent good. And in proportion as he relaxed, old James Heriot stiffened, and then, Archibald



relaxed the more. They parted farther and farther, like two ends of an elastic band. The day came at last when there was a rebound, and—a snap.

Jean never heard the beginning of it. When she came into the room, she narrated, her father was just saying—

“A turning after the flesh-pots of Egypt is ane o’ the warst signs, Archie. Sin will lodge whiles in the grandest saint while he’s in the flesh. But he kens it’s sin and hates it, and will have none of it. He gangs through it like a man through a plague-stricken countrie. He takes as muckle care against it as he may, and heeds all the advices of his P’hysician, and if he gets touched wi’ the disease, it’s sair against his will. But to call good, evil, and evil, good, is the verra sin o’ deevils and unregenerate men. Doth not Malachi say that it is this which wearies the Lord Almighty? •Straight is the gate and narrow is the way, Archie, which leads to the kingdom of God, and think ye there would be sae few to walk therein if it were braid enough to hae room for your jufkettings and your stage-plays, and your laughter, that is as the crackling o’ thorns under a pot? •Is it seemly that the children o’ a king suld wear the gauds o’ his Arch. Enemy? •Na, na, Archie, surely na, na.”

• “But Archie was restive like,” Jean told me,  
• and asked, “Were we to think every bright thing  
was a gaud of the Arch Enemy?” And then my  
father took up his words in his quick way, saying—  
“Every bright thing! It doesna seem sae muckle  
that we thraw owre to him. We hae our bairns,  
and our freends, an’ the gran’ pleasure o’ honest  
wark, an’ the bonnie face o’ creation, an’ the sang  
o’ birds, an’ the guid books o’ godly men. An’ a’  
that’s to be given up, are the late hours an’ the  
fineries, an’ the flummeries, an’ the wine-bibblings,  
that waste awa’ money an’ health, an’ the vera soul  
itself. An’ the stage-plays, wi’ fule men and puir  
painted women, that dinna ken hoo to pay their ain  
way honest, befoolin’ ye to fancy them heroes and  
empresses. Hoot, toot, Archibald Heriot, I ken  
this licht conversation wasena what ye wanted when  
ye were lying at the point o’ death in your ship off  
the Mauritius.”

“But Archie wouldna give in,” Jean went on,  
shaking her head, which was already white when I  
first knew her. ••“He said there was a time for  
everything, and that if father himsel’ was satisfied  
wi’ what he had, he had no richt to condemn those  
who wanted more. That his ways might be richt  
for him, and perhaps theirs might be richt for

them.' An' he finished wi' saying that 'such first-class Christians would be nane the worse for a bit more charity.'

"That put my father's blood up, Mr. Garrett. He was an auld man, ye ken, and na much used to dealing wi' folk that didna think wi' him. 'It sets ill wi' your freends o' the playhouse and the dance to ask charity o' us,' he said, 'for we gie them mair measure the noo than they gie us. We hope the best o' them if they'd only turn frae the error o' their ways, and be wise. But they write us doon a' heepocrates' and whited sepulchres, and damned a'ready. They justify their ain uncleanness, and gloat owre the spots in our feasts o' charity.'

"'Weel, sir,' returned puir Archie, 'and there are sinners and sin among professors of religion. You canna deny it, and you, and the strictest o' elders, and the best o' ministers canna help it. Even when naething is kenned that can be fenced frae the Table, still you know it's there; you know you've hypocrites amang you,—a' the waur for being first-rate ones.'

"'Aweel, aweel,' said my father, standing up in his earnestness, and speaking wi' a solemnity that didna ill befitt sic an elder as he was. 'I s na that

what I say? If a' the holy discipline o' God's kirk canna keep oot the deevil and the auld Adam, what maun it be whaur they're invited in? Because a robber climbed your wall whiles, wad ye elect to pu' it doon? Na, Archibald Heriot, me an' mine will keep to the auld highway, an' no turn into the crooked by-paths that lead nowheres, or waur. If I didna hold these licht ways to be sin, I should count them folly: if I didna think' they imperilled the warld to come, I wouldna wish to gang through this warld wi' the sons and daughters of Belial. There'e naebody who pulls wi' me that gaes to that deevil's fair, the playhouse. There's mair masters that dinna care than that do, I say to my journey-men, sae if ye want to gang there, gang to them. Ha' your wull, I say, but leave me to mine, which is, that me and my hoose will be of ane mind, and serve the Lord.'

"Waes me, Mr. Garrett," Jean narrated, "but at that word puir Archie was up in his chair, and his face was dour and flushed. He was used to sway authority rather than to thole it. Maybe what had started their talk gave mair meaning than seemed to those words of my father.

"'Sin,' said Archie, 'you shall not have to say that twice to me. I went to the theatre last night,

and I shall go again when I choose. But I willna offend your opinions even if you would allow ane beneath your roof who differed frae you. I will gae out o' my own accord.' And he just turned back at the door and said—

“‘Good-bye, Jean.’

“‘Waes me, waes me that there suld be such backsliding in Israel!’ said father, and went off to his workshop. I couldna tell whether he expected Archie would be back at tea time. Eh, Mr. Garrett, but I dinna ken whether I expected him mysel’. I think I wanted to, but didna. I mind I didna set his cup and plate in their places, but put them on the dumb-waiter ready to my hand. An’ it was days and days before I went into the room where he had slept, and folded up and put away the few bits of wearing apparel that he had left behind him. Father and I never changed a word aboot him. He dropped oot frae our lives, as if he’d never come into them. Eh, but the hoose was lonely without Archie.”

And there she always paused, remembering those dumb, dead days when she had to miss the presence that had somehow completed the unity of their household life, just as Archie’s fine tenor voice had improved the melody of their evening “wor-

ship." But Jean had still sung her psalm and lived her life the best way she could. Did she ever weep in the silence of her own chamber? God knows. But I think very likely not; and at any rate, there would be never a tear-trace on her face when she came out. She was one of those women who keep the secrets of their lives by never even whispering them to their own heart. She might own to herself that she missed him, but it would be with the resolute self-excuse:—"Of course I do. I missed our auld housekeeper when she died. I'd got to miss him sooner or later. He couldna bide here always. He'd ha' been sailing awa' in his ship whiles. But if one keeps one's self busy, one gets over it by-an'-by. Only it's harder to be fearing for his soul's salvation than for his body's safety. I maun just pray that he may see the danger o' the turning he is in, and be brought back to the straight, plain paths o' righteousness. I'm wae that father had to speak him sae hard, but father kens best. Maybe, gentle words wi' such like errors would be like mild medicines in deadly diseases. An' even if father did speak sharply, puir Archie suld ha' taken it kindly frae an elder and a father in Israel. Dothna David say, 'Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness: and let him

reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil which shall not break my head.' "

And so in due time the waves of years and years had rolled over the sharp pain of that sudden parting, and James Heriot had grown old and feeble, and the business had nigh left off decreasing, because it had settled at its lowest point. By that time Gunner's Row, too, had nearly sunk to its worst. The congregation at the Presbyterian chapel had so dwindled away that, when the minister died, the building was closed, though it was not immediately profaned by the wandering minstrels who came by-and-by. .

Yet the old man clung to his business. To such as him, a craft is not merely something to get bread by, but something to be done honestly and faithfully—the homely material whereon to practise stern and sterling principles. Inferior work might be preferred to his, because cheaper, and meretricious ornament might have become more popular than durability and finish; but to his mind it seemed a yielding to Satan and his hosts to vacate the field where he was so unfairly beaten. With a true width in his seemingly narrow vision, the dishonesties and shams which he detected creeping into his own little trade, were to him typical of

similar demoralisation in commerce, statecraft, society, and religion. He felt it to be his duty to stop the particular leak over which he stood,—never mind though other's desertion of their posts left the flood to overwhelm him. He was as much on his honour as a sentinel in an earthquake, or a captain on a burning ship. And even as those allow no weakening dream of home to pass between them and duty, so I think his sense of old and well-earned commercial reputation actually rose even above his fatherly tenderness for Jean's future interests. To be sure, I gathered that as he had gone often and oftener to the little store hoarded in better days, he had always sought her opinion and advice with wistful tenacity. "Dinna ye think I suld do it, Jean? Things maun tak a turn whiles, and it's worth a sacrifice to keep to the fore till then. Ye dinna think I suld na do it, Jean?" and, said Jean, "In speaking of those times, 'I'm sure father had a right to do what he willed wi' his ain. He had made it and saved it himsel', and I only hoped God grant it last his time oot, and even if no, we shouldna ha' been worse off than if he had ne'er got it, and I maun ha' warked and fended for him in my turn.'"

But it never came to that. There was still money



in the stocks, when word went round Gunner's Row that "old Mr. Heriot was dying."

That was twenty years after Archibald had left them. Twenty years of utter silence about him, between those two, living as it were one life. To me, there is something sublime in the power of reserve shut in those northern souls. I wonder how far did the father and daughter realise it in each other, or how far did each think the other's silence to be sheer indifference and forgetfulness. Jean knew her father often started at a sudden knock, and gazed long at the superscription of unexpected letters. But twenty years is a long, long time—time enough to make brown heads white, and green memories grey. But at last, Death had come, with that weird touch of his which burns up the petty scrawlings of existence, and brings out the secret lines of life.

And so James Heriot lay a-dying in the back parlour. It had been made his bedroom since he had grown too feeble to mount stairs. Jean was there, watching alone. She was not a woman to fear the sight of death. She would not have been afraid when she was a girl, and she was no girl by this time, but a woman of forty-five. But sitting there, she must have remembered that when that failing breath

failed, she would be alone in the world. Neither lover nor kindred for Jean Heriot, unless—and the exception must have leaped back on her heart, and startled it—unless her kinsman, Archibald, were still alive.”

Over and over again she told me the story of that death-bed. Even then I was struck with the strange accuracy of each repetition. Never a word or a shade of feeling varied.

“My father had lain quiet for hours before he said, faintly—

“‘Jean, lass, ye ken I’m gauging—dinna ye sae, my lassie?’”

“Aweel, I could na speak him fause then, s̄ae I said, ‘Yes, father, I fear ye are. But we canna tell. Ye’ve been nearly as bad whiles, and yet bright eno’ again, next morn.’”

They would never have spoken so plainly to each other before. There was a strong agony of love between them that could not have borne the uttered pain. She, whose eyes were not already half shut to earth, sought to veil it even yet.

“‘I’ve no’ used up every plack before I went, my lassie,’ he said—‘I’m glad o’ that. Ye’ll find freends, my lassie, never fear o’t. “Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in

the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." Lang means guid, lassie—dinna fear.'

"I tellt him that I dinna fear.

" 'Yet I culd wish I dinna leave ye sae lanesome, Jeanie,' father said. 'I wish ye were sib to some guid body. Jeanie, lass, I'm sair misdoubtin' but I was owre hard wi' young Archibald Heriot.'

" 'It's no' that I gae back mysel' frae what I thoct the while,' father went on focbly. 'It seems mair true than ever the noo. It's no' when ane's lyin' here that ane wishes that he hadna read his Bible sae muckle, and had lived as near the border o' Vanity Fair as he culd, wi'oot paying rent to the devil; but it is, when ane's lying here, that ane's wae for ilka hard word he ever spak, and ilka angry thoct he ever had. I might ha' spak the truth safter to the puir laddie, wha, dootless, had divers temptations, wi'in an' wi'oot, that I didna ken. There were mony a sharp proverb o' King Solomon's aboot fules, rinnin in my heid that day, Jeanie, but noo, I canna mind any o' them sae well as oor Saviour's words, "Whoso shall offend aye o' these little anes which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstane were hanget about his neck, and that he were drooned in the deep o' the sea." I canna but think that oor Archibald was aye o' those little anes, Jeanie.

Spiritually, young an' little, an' weak for the kingdom o' God, maybe, but still enterin' there. God Almighty grant, Jeanie, that he'd won in sae far, that nae wickedness o' mine could frichten him a'thegither oot. I preached truth o' contention and nae love, Jeanie. Couldna I reason for ance wi' my ain flesh an' bluid, that was aye winsome and open-minded, wi' just a bit o' the patience and gentleness wi' whilk oor blessed Lord and Saviour reasoned owre and owre again wi' those contentious scribes and Pharisees that he knewed were ganging aboot to slay Him. O Jeanie, Jeanie, woman! it's nae sae muckle I've got to leave ye, but I'd gie a haill hunder o't to see Archibald Heriot face to face before I dee, and to ken that the prood, evil speerit o' my words hadna shut him oot a'thegither frae the truth that was in them.'

"Eh," said Jean, "but it hurt my heart to hear him blamin' himself sae sairly. Hoowas he to have supposed that puir Archie was to fly aff in sic a waeful passion. An' I said as much.

"But he wadna heed. 'Jeanie, lassie,' he said, 'dinna try to soften it: I'll trust it wi' God. Only, if ever it so be that ye get word, or hae word o' Archibald Heriot, tell him that his auld uncle was gey sorry, no' for what he said, but for hoo he said

it. And that auld James Heriot will weary sair till he sees him safe in heaven. Ye heard me, lassie, didna ye ? for I canna say it owre again. An' ye'll no' forget."

He died that night.

Jean did not leave the old house, nor did she throw the burden of her arrangements upon the nearest masculine shoulders which were willing to take the weight. And there were such. Jean was a respected woman, and she found her father's medical man, and sundry of his old business connections, ready to rally round her in her trouble. I dare say they would have done everything for her, but she meant to act for herself, always grateful for their countenance and advice, though she did not always accept the latter.

"They wanted me to buy an annuity," she told me, "but I said no—I'd just put up wi' the interest, though it might be sae much less. I shouldna ha' liked my father's earnings to be tied up an' sunk wi' me, as if I was a puir dumb beast, that wanted nae mair than to be safely provided wi' bit and sup, and decent burial. I hope I shallna live wi'out coming across somebody that I should like to leave a kindness to, when it's my turn to go away."

It was impossible for her to continue the responsi-

bility of renting the whole of the great old house, however she might let it off. She was advised to remove altogether, and to sell her cumbrous old goods, and buy lighter furniture better suited to the suburban lodgings that were recommended to her.

Jean listened thoughtfully, and only replied that there were many things to arrange first. And these arrangements proved to be that she might remain as a lodger in the parlours of her old home, and that it was precisely the most ancient and lumbering of her household goods which would be most useful to her. But though she thus took her own way, she took it humbly and inoffensively, not setting it forth as better than her adviser's, but only as better for her. So nobody was offended. And the old doctor, who had been the most enthusiastic advocate of new cheffoniers and lighter chairs, might presently have been seen exerting all his geometrical powers in the adaptation of the old furniture to its narrower bounds.

The front parlour had been originally fitted as the bookbinding office, and Jean did not remove the presses and shelves, nor even the old counter. "She could use it, and naebody else would," she said. "It was a good deed to keep anything frae destruction, and it suld not make firewood in her day."

As for the great corner press, in its lower closed section, she stored out of sight her saucepans and such other cooking utensils, while in its upper glazed division, the ordinary cups and dishes of household use were arranged in a semi-ornamental style, which made it a kind of humble companion to the smaller press opposite, filled with books and curious knick-knacks of china, shell, and ivory. There was a side table with a cover of rich faded Utrecht velvet. A Covenanting ancestor's portrait hung over the mantelpiece, and Jean, who did cooking like a lady, did not fear that her cooking operations would damage her old Turkey rug. The rest of the oak floor she left bare. The room was to be kitchen and parlour, and it told the plain truth of itself, to the least observant eye.

So did Jean. Her ordinary attire of dark strong stuff gown, print apron, bit of genuine lace fastened round her throat by a fine old cameo, and mob-cap of delicate embroidered muslin, all bespoke the well-bred woman, who did her own work, and meant to do it promptly and easily, with no fiddle-faddle. Such was the figure, tall and angular, with strong face, sparkling eyes, and silvery hair, which came to sit, always at work, behind the short knitted curtain at the broad window of the old house. Such was

Jean Heriot and such her surroundings in the days when I first knew her. It was only her cheery talk which, like a bright and roomy window, gave me such an out-look over her past.

As I have said, Gunner's Row was a sad, shifty and shifting street by the time I knew it. Always coming and going, and being distrained for rent, and trying to sell pawn-tickets. But every nomad who lingered there longer than a week heard something of Jean Heriot. How she had been born in the house where she lived, and how she kept no servant, only a cat, and how morning and evening she read the Bible aloud to herself, and sang the Scotch psalms valiantly. They laughed at her, and were afraid of her—by no means an uncommon combination. But in spite of this, she presently became as useful in Gunner's Row at large, as she had been in her father's household. Her energies, set free from personal claims, were ready to flow into and fill many channels. Now, she would strike, like the sun, on some poor draggled, deadened woman, and re-vitalise her into healthful activity and domestic pride. Next she would find work for some of that class of poor creatures, who are dreadfully willing and awfully unable. Then she would carry her plain wisdom and strong gentleness into some poor



sick room, where she, with her cookery, and sanitary improvements, and cheerful hopefulness, soon proved so useful, that when she would rebuke the parish doctor for "puttin' aff his puir folk ow'r's much to that nonsense-callant o' an assistant, who does na ken mair than a blue pill and a black draught," the doctor would laughingly answer that his conscience felt quite easy while she was there, and remind her of her slight esteem for "doctor's stuff" in general.

"Weel," she would say, "an sae I have. If people could get good food, warm clothes, and peace o' mind, they would na need much o' ye. But the world's gone that far, crooked and unnatural, that these three blessings are often harder to come at than pills and potions. An' however I may lichtlie his physie, Doctor Wilson, I never lichtlie the doctor himself. Ye're a grand stand by when there's trouble in a hoose. Ye mayna ken much, but ye ken mair than ithers, and ye're knowledge aye mak's ye saft and hopefu', an' no' ready to be readin' death sentences that will maybe turn roond, and make fules o' ye."

It was but little money or money's worth that Jean Meriot had to spare, but without stint she lent her helpful hands, her strong spirit, and her bright Christian insight,—an alms which cannot be written

in earthly subscription lists, but which surely stand high on those heavenly records, which register even a cup of cold water.

But Jean had something more to encounter than even the half-enough trial of a surrounding penury born of idleness and helplessness. There are men who blame God for sufferings which obedience to His laws would prevent, and grudge His denial of blessings whose conditions they will not accept. Gunner's Row had been long degenerated from its old Presbyterian godliness; but, still, if it had not gone to church or chapel, it had held in a limp way that it was the right thing so to do, and that it should do so itself some day, when it had a new bonnet, or a new pair of boots, as the case might be.

But now, into the frayed web of life in Gunner's Row there shot a darker thread. To the old house at the corner, where the minister himself had once lived, there came an infidel tailor, a man who strutted and vaunted, and took out the poor dummy watch that he wore while his good one was in pawn, and gave God "five minutes to strike him dead if He could," and guessed when the five minutes were up and slipped back the dummy, and crowed over his thrilled auditors as with an unanswerable argu-

ment,—as if God was pledged to answer the devil's challenge!

The tailor had many visitors like unto himself. And he spent every evening at the tavern, spouting about the Budget, and the Speeches in Parliament. Jean Heriot never made but one pur in her life, and, I am sorry to say, it was never forgotten by the youth of Gunner's Row.

"The puir body's naething but a spout himsel'," she said, "sae ic's nae wonder that a' he has gaes up ane!"

But she could not help knowing that doubt and defiance were springing up around her. Those who had hitherto been content to suffer the penalty of their own faults, now fiercely put off all blame upon somebody else—Royalty, Government, or parish. A young shoemaker next door, a clever lad, with whom Jean had often held "pleasant cracks," tore his Bible out of its cover, and made spills of the leaves. Jean sat and knitted, till her heart burned within her. To her, it was truly as if a mouth of hell had suddenly yawned before the threshold of her old home.

And while she was sorely pondering what could be done—for Jean's mind was far too original to accept the common nostrum of shutting one's eyes

—lo! the evil thing was under her own roof; in the very house of all those prayers and Bible-readings, and innocent days of diligent labour and domestic happiness—in the sacred home of her own youth. For, just at this time, the upper part of the dwelling was to be let. It was taken by the infidel tailor and his associated friends; and one bright morning, Jean awoke to find him nailing over the door the signboard of “The Hall of Progress and Free-thought.”

Something of wrath entered into Jean’s sorrow and pain, and gave bitterness to the pang she felt as she listened to the lecturers and their audiences tramping in and out, “quietly and respectably enough,” as the non-resident landlord dared to answer when Jean offered him her indignant protest. He even added, that anybody who was so very particular had better seek a more select locality.

“As if there was naething to do, but to gie the place to the devil,” said Jean to me. “But I’ll not give up my father’s auld house to blasphemy and abomination without a word. I’ll have nae mair to do wi’ the law of landlord, or parish, or police, for I see fine that sae lang as the sepulchre’s whited, their law doesna care for the dead men’s bones within. They’re but the warld, after all, and I

dinna see why we suld need the world's weapons to fight the Lord's battle. I'll just spread the story before himsel', and listen for his word answering in my soul."

It came. Jean's mouth tightened just a little, and a new light came up in her eyes, as she opened her parlour door, drew her little table towards it, laid the "ha' Bible" thereon, and seated herself in readiness. Not one should pass in to listen to the infidel's arguments, but he should take in his ear some word from the story of the Saviour's death, or of Paul's conversion, or of Korah's rebellion.

It was a weird sight at the door of the temple of unbelief—this grave pure woman, with her holy book, sitting before her well-ordered chamber. The woman and the chamber were the best commentary on the book.

Many scoffed before her face, and as she sat she could hear more angry words when the corner of the stair was turned. In the daytime, when her door was closed, she sometimes caught muttered threats outside.

They could not understand her—how should they? The miserable woman who "did" for the "Hall of Progress and Free-thought" had a little two-year-old child, though she wore no wedding-ring. One day

it was hurt in the street, and Jean took it in and kept it in her room till its mother's return, and then put it into her arms and kissed it, and spoke so kindly that the poor woman went up-stairs and cried bitterly. She had once thought it a fine thing to deny that God's name and blessing were a necessary seal for any human vow; but in these, her days of abject desertion, she sometimes felt that even the anger of an offended God was kinder than the kindness of a godless man.

And Jean went on with her work. Some women, who can read "Childe Harold" and watch out "La Traviata," and promiscuously discuss fictions boiling with passion and hot spiced with sin, will scornfully say that she must have been "very strongminded." This was a woman who had never read novel or play, who had all the strictest notions of female silence and submission. But she took her principles of life from the Bible, and counted it as true womanly to contend with spiritual disease as with mortal sickness. She could not have left plague-stricken bodies to perish—why should she leave sin-stricken souls? One night Jean Heriot was at her usual post, but her duties seemed over for a while. The audience had passed in, the lecture was proceeding. Suddenly a creak of the door announced a new-comer, and

Jean bent forward to resume her reading. The chosen portions had grown so sadly familiar to her by this time, that she could point their application by the free gaze of her bright keen eyes.

"The fool hath said in his heart there is no God." "But that's not you," she broke off abruptly, responding to the white young face that looked in at her from the darkness of the passage. Almost a boy's face. He might have passed on, but that sudden ejaculation seemed to bind him like a spell.

"Na, that's no' you," she said. "God has given you understanding an' you havena darkened it yet. Ye havena the eyes of those who're clear satisfied they're as the beasts that perish. Ye're mair like ane divided in yesel', that wad fain think it was sae, but canna, and in ane sense, wadna. It's an awfu' road ye're goin', laddie. The Lord may gie ye your wull, and let ye put out his light in your soul. If you want to ha' na heaven for yesel, is a there ane you want it for? Hae you no'er a grave belonging to you? If not noo, ye will ha' some whiles, and ye'll want back the faith ye're thraving away this day, and wha shall say but then the Lord shall let your own iniquities keep you prisoner, and leave you holden fast by the cords of your ain sin. Dinna tempt Him, laddie. I dinna think you will. The

Lord has purposes o' mcrey to ye. Is it not sae?"

In her zeal she had risen and stood beside him; stood over him as it were, for, as his head bowed on his breast, the tall woman was taller than he.

He was shaking with terrible silent sobs. Jean could see how it was. She had come upon the crisis of a life. She was silent. Silence is often prayer with women like Jean Heriot.

"I have nowhere to go!" he murmured.

"Come and sit in my parlour," she said cheerily. "The deevil shallna have that excuse to get ye, if I can help it. I'm auld enough to be your mother—almost your grandmother. I'm just going to have family worship. I aye have it by mysel' noo, but it will be like old times to ha' company. We'll read the fifty-first Psalm, and then, as maybe you don't know many of my Scotch tunes, we'll just pitch the 'Old Hundredth,' for, there's none in London to-night with mair right than us to sing—

'We are his flock: He doth us feed,  
And for his sheep, He doth us take.'

And then we'll take a bite o' bread and cheese; and ye shall tell me all about it."

"Poor laddie," she told me afterwards, "he was



sore softened and humbled, and we talked long together. He was in London alone, far awa' frae his ain people, an' it was the auld, auld story o' riotous livin', wi' the swine's husks afterwards for a digester. He hadna a shilling left that night, gentleman-born as he was, and he was just going to mak' a hole in the water, and had come hereaway to hearten himself up that that wad be the end o' him. I wadna lose my grip o' him. I made him try for a little sleep on my au'd parlour sofa, and early in the morning I crap oot of my bedroom and went and bought some radishes and cresses, and brown bread and fresh butter, and made a bonny hamely country breakfast. As long as Satan docsna spare his wiles, I dinna see why we suld spare ours. I had mair talk wi' him the morn. His people were pious folk, but since he'd been in London, he'd thought it dull, and that there wasna harm in going to sights and theatres; and when maist o' his friends' that went there went also to music-halls and dancing-pavilions, and sic like, why suld he not go as well? They told him the harm wasna in th' places but in himsel'—and maybe he found that muckle true, only th' places fetched it oot.

“ ‘There's not much pleasure there apart from wickedness,’ says he, ‘I'll own that. I can't say

I've laughed heartily there once, except when it was the devil laughing in me.' "

"He was a well-spoken lad," said Jean; "the young stuff that grows into real fine men. I told him he'd nothing to do but just gae away home, like the prodigal, and say, "Father, I have sinned and am no mair worthy to be called thy son." I gave him his third-class railway fare. Perhaps he'd never travelled sae before, but I wasna going to pamper him, though I could trust him to come back and pay me, anyhow. And after he'd gone there was a dreadful grumbling and growling on the stairs, but I took na' notice, but just lockit puir Broonie, my cat, into my bedroom, for fear they should think to spite me by harming the puir beast, and then I went on in the auld way. An' wad ye believe it, only three weeks after they took down their signboard and went off. Sae ye see there's some good in being auld an' ugly, and nobody left to be scandalised or perilled by whatever ye do. The mair God empties your hands o' their ain work, the mair ye may ken He has special work to gie 'em.' "

The house soon got another set of tenants, poor and ignorant, indeed, but hard-working and well-intentioned, into whose trials and struggles Jean threw herself with all the zest of a strong-hearted woman.

Not very long afterwards, as I was sitting, one fine summer evening, talking to Jean, a stranger came sauntering down Gunner's Row. He was a bronzed, battered, elderly man, of sailor-like appearance, who looked to his right hand and to his left, in an interested but scarcely expectant manner.

But when he came to the long, low, bulging window with the knitted curtain, and the name of Heriot still plain on the carved architrave above it,—he stood still. Only for a moment: then he crossed the road, and came in,—and his hand was just laid hesitatingly on the parlour door, when Jean opened it suddenly on her side, and cried out heartily—

"Praised be God. It's Archibald Heriot at last!"

The travel-worn sailor dropped into the nearest chair of the room, whose familiarity doubtless seemed stranger to him than the wildest and strangest scene he had ever seen.

"I needn't ask for uncle," he said wistfully.

"He's been where it is well with him, for mony and mony a year," Jane answered, "and I've been wearying ever since to give ye the message he left you."

"What! did he think I was worth the trouble,

after all!" said Archibald, with a smile whose sadness took all suspicion of mockery from his words.

"Did he think ye were worth the while!" echoed Jean. "Listen. He bade me—with his dying breath, Archie—to tell you he was wae fu' sorry, not for what he said, but for how he said it, and that he would be wearying sair till he saw ye safe in heaven. I wrote down his words next day after he was dead, and I've read them owre an' owre again, till I ken them fine. It lay heavy on his heart that he mightn't have been patient and gentle eno' with you. Did he think ye worth the trouble, indeed! Archie, man, ye thought yoursel' braid and enlightened and tolerant, and ye wrote him down in your heart, as hard and wrathfu' and self-righteous. But when he was deid, an' I went seeking trace o' you for his sake, didna I find he had been everywhere before me. He couldna track ye. I dinna ken yet that you've ever come back to look for him till this day, Archie. I trow we shouldna wear hardness and bitterness anyhow, but if we maun, I dinna ken but they are better on our tongues than in our hearts. Dinna grieve owre it, now, Archie. Ye've come back at last, and haply, he keus o't where he is. Whaur ha' ye been, this lang time, Archie, and how ha' ye fared?"

"God's been with me, everywhere," the sailor answered, reverently. "He'd got a hold of me that. He never let go. I've been among all sorts of people, Jean. I made up my mind I wouldn't be strict and strait-laced, as I called it. I thought I wouldn't force religion on anybody. I thought I had no right to say all hands should pipe to divine worship on Sundays; but I found the devil wasn't so ceevil as to teach his servants I had no right to hear them cursing and swearing and talking 'all manner of uncleanness. I thought it was na harm to go to a play or a dance when I came off a dreary long voyage. And then somehow I didn't care so much for my chapel and my Bible, and got the wrong sort of friends, and was altogether like that miserable church of the Laodiceans, thinking myself full of licht and wisdom, and knowing not that I was wretched and miserable, and poor and blind and naked, neither cold nor hot, a very provocation to my gracious Lord. I don't think I was in a state of damnation downright all that time, Jean; but it's ane thing to be in just inside the hoose-door, standing on the damp mat in the cauld and gloming, an' it's anither thing to be seated, snug and safe, in the warmth and comfort of the verra hearth. There's mair wanted in physical life than just bare food and

raiment, else we might be content to go doon to the workhouse for them. And so the soul cannot know what salvation means that expects to be satisfied with mere safety. But it was an awful day for me, when I heard my poor 'prentice, dying of cholera, crying out against me for the blood of his soul. Not me, myself, poor fellow, he didn't blame me. But says he, 'there's nobody spoken a good word to me, since I left home (we were out for two years); there's nobody thought of anything but their work, an' then their pleasure. I've gone with 'em to places where I promised my mother I'd never go, an' I've learned ways an' done deeds, that I didn't so much as know of when I left home.' And the worst o't was, Jean, I couldn't pray for him, or with him. I just could not! I didn't know what to say. God wasn't on my side, and that's a strait where the devil will not help ye. And while I stood dumb—the lad died. O Jean, Jean, it was only your father's tenderness of heart that made him have a feeling about me. But this is a sword, ay, piercing through mine, so that I shall seek peace and find none."

"Na, Archibald, God saith not sq. Doth not He say, 'Return, and I will heal your backslidings. I have seen your ways an' will heal you.' I will lead you also and restore comforts unto you and to your

mourners.' Wha shall limit the Lord's mercies, Archibald? Maybe, when that poor boy could speak na mair, Christ said to him, as He said ance before, 'This day shalt thou be with me in paradise.' I say na forget him, Archibald, but remember him no' to break your heart and tie your hands, but to urge ye on to work harder in the time remaining. Ye maun never let anither soul gang by ye wi'oot knowing your fighting colours. Only the Lord be praised ye've come back again. An' I canna help thinking that my father knows o't, and maybe has known aboot it a lang while ago, for I'm thinking there's a quicker telegraph to heaven than any man has invented yet awhile. Living my quiet life, Archie, with no clish-ma-claver roond me to deafen me to all but itself, I dinna feel my father sae far awa' and strange as some people seem to feel their deid. When I hear them say they hope they may meet and know their Christian friends in heaven, I think they're no sure that God is any better than the slaveholder who breaks up a household that wants to keep together, and na so good as the mony, mony true men that have given up their place at shipwreck or fire that some husband an' wife or father an' child might gae together. And yet whaur can that kind goodness come frae, if not frae

God himself'. Can the created be better than the Creator?"

Then Archibald told her of the wife he had married and buried;—spoke of her kindly and sorrowfully, but with a shade of reservation which I am sure Jean understood and respected. And I took that opportunity to steal out. I would not interrupt them for formal civilities, and they never noticed my going. So I left the two together, sitting side by side, and talking and bridging over their wide past of silence.

And thus Jean was not left quite alone in her old age. She never quitted the old house in Gunner's Row, but there, ever and anon in the intervals of his voyages, came her kinsman, Captain Archibald Heriot, and there she entertained him, and opened her hearty hospitality to his mates and 'prentices and crew. There, too, once or twice a year, came a young squire from Cumberland, and the pretty wife he brought last time is Jean's only "lady" visitor, though humble women are plentiful enough.

We will let the curtain of our story fall over her thus: helping out poor marriage outfits, supplementing poor dinners, soothing poor death-beds. She lived so for many years. A sound constitution from nature, and a sanctified spirit from Christ, are good



capital for long life. No beauty, no genius—with neither rank, nor wealth, nor romance—yet this was a life worth living.

And when we contrast our poor insipid lives, with perhaps one drop of godly energy diluted in streams of timorous inactivity, does it not seem to us, as it did to Archibald Heriot, that we may have paid too dear for our “innocent indulgences and relaxations,” if they cost us the “power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the Enemy?”

## VIII.

### THE CRACKLING OF THORNS.

A YOUNG gentleman of the name of Percy Hare, was "placed" in our office more than thirty years ago. He was no mere hired clerk, whose duties were only to do just as much as he could for a given salary. His prime duty was to learn.

He was an orphan, and had a small income of his own. The principal would not be in his power till he was of age; and his guardians had wisely determined that he should then be in a position to invest it in business, and so enlarge its interest and increase the value of his own existence at the same time.

He was a pleasant, lively lad, with a fair frank face, golden hair, and the highest flow of mercurial spirits that I ever knew. I say, mercurial spirits, advisedly, for they were not of that healthy hearty sort that have roots struck deep into the very soul, like Mr. Swift's. Indeed I fear it is such as Percy

Hare who bring mirth into bad repute,—showing it as aimless, if harmless, bubble, blowing along life, and dampening where it breaks, rather than as pure, silvery foam cresting the waves of a deep and rolling ocean.

Percy Hare was always laughing, after their fashion of laughter who have never wept. He saw fun in everything, but he saw nothing else. He taught the office cat to beg, and to leap, but he never could get the ledger right. He found out comic traits in everybody, and narrated office incidents in a style that nearly killed us with laughing. He knew all about everybody's courtship, and made lucky guesses as to when each "popped the question." And he was a general favourite, not only with the lads, but even with those others of my colleagues who, like myself, were already past the first giddiness of youth.

Only the old, white-haired men of the place were a little inclined to shake their heads over Percy's sallies, even while they smiled. Mr. Lambert himself, of whom Percy did not stand in the same reverent awe as the rest of us, did not even smile. Nay, he once or twice spoke in his gentle firm way of rebuke.

"Life is not all a joke, Mr. Hare," he said.

• “But there’s no harm in enjoying oneself while one can, is there, sir?” Percy Hare asked, unabashed.

“No harm, but great good,” said our stately patriarch. • “But life has to-morrows as well as to-days.”

“But aren’t we told, sir, that ‘sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof’?” Percy answered, with a spice of polite mockery in his musical voice.

“Yes, we are indeed,” Mr. Lambert said, and spoke with some severity; “but you shirk all that you consider the ‘evils’ of to-day, and in that case, let me tell you, young gentleman, life will keep a reckoning of your debt, and you will have a hard score to pay some time.”

“It’s all very fine for the governor to talk,” Percy Hare said, aside, among his comrades. “What’s the good of my life to me if I’m to be cribbed up in this office mooning at my desk, from nine in the morning till six or seven at night. I don’t care to be rich, I really don’t now. There’s my old uncle has two thousand a-year, and he has so spoiled his digestion in the getting of it, that he scarcely dares to eat anything except what he’d get if he was a casual pauper, dry bread and skilly. What good is his money to him. I wonder. I’ve

plenty to keep me well already ; it will be easy enough for me to get as much more as ever I shall want, without tying myself down to business like a bond slave. I like fresh air and sunshine and bustling about. Of course I shall settle down some day, everybody does, when they get old. I shan't show my face again to Lambert to-day, as he's so crusty. So I'll just go off on the quiet about four o'clock, and then I'll get to Kensington in time to catch the band, and ten to one the Mertons will be there. I'll buy a posy for myself as I pass the Bank, and then I'll look quite a swell ! Good-bye, all you dear grimy old fellows, killing yourselves that you may live. I'll 'gather my rosebuds while I may.' ”

Everybody in the office knew all about the Mertons. The family consisted of a widow lady and two daughters—girls just in budding womanhood. Their dead father had been one of young Hare's original trustees, and Percy was very intimate in their house. He made no secret that he “ adored ” Edith, the youngest sister. It was a genuine enough affection for a boyish adoration : he adhered to any article of dress she happened to commend, bought her roses, sent her valentines, and toasted “ Miss E. M.” in the small beer of the junior clerk's common dinner-table, which his good fellowship

often volunteered to join, though his dainty tastes made him a connoisseur among the higher-class ordinaries of the neighbourhood.

The Mertons were well to do. Indeed the mother had a considerable fortune entirely at her own disposal, and they kept a barouche, and spent a good deal of time at spas and watering places. They were by no means averse to Percy's lively society, and, in their feminine ignorance of the duties of young men of business, doubtless held out to him many alluring temptations that would have been better kept out of his way.

Such a sunny life it seemed to the poor heedless lad! Not that he never thought about the future. He did. He was always revelling in some rose-coloured vision of holiday and travel. I can fancy what a charm his talk must have had for pretty Edith Merton, as they two walked together along the sands of Hastings, or up and down the fashionable promenades of the West-end. For it *was* fascinating. It was not the old, false, selfish sentiment with which Fred Godfrey had once deluded me. This *was* real as far as it went. Even as syllabub is a reality! Only you can't live on it.

In the office they were very patient with him, saying to themselves, that he was young and not

well advised, and had no parents to enforce steadiness and industry. He was very troublesome to them. Nobody could reckon on him, to be anywhere at any time or to do anything. It became a grim joke amongst us that we had better look in the morning papers, to see "if anything was up," and then we should know not to expect Mr. Hare. Now it was a picture-gallery, then it was a boat-race, next a cricket-match, but constantly something.

Yet they kept him hanging on. I know the heads of the firm debated the matter sometimes among themselves. True, he was a pupil, not a clerk. But he was a pupil only too likely to demoralise and dissatisfy the clerks, and for any advantages that he himself was gaining, Lambert and Co. felt it almost a robbery to retain the heavy premium his guardians had paid. Yet in their merciful wisdom they still forebore to cut him adrift; and I scarcely know how long they might not have hesitated if he had not settled the matter himself, by taking what in a saucy, giggling note, he called "French leave," and starting off to join a fellow traveller in a cruise on the Mediterranean.

His indignant guardians waited on our firm. They proposed to fetch him back and hold him on

his high-desk-stool by main force. But Messrs. Lambert and Co. felt they had a right to a word now. It would be better for him not to return; he seemed so unlikely to profit by anything they could do for him. Perhaps some other business or profession might be found which would suit him better. In the meantime, they wished to behave with the accustomed honour of their house; and although he had been with them half his time, a great trouble and responsibility and no service, yet they would be very willing to return two-thirds of the premium they had received.

After some consultation this offer was accepted; and the last I heard of Percy Hare, for many years, was contained in a little note which reached me in the course of the following summer.

"DEAR GARRETT,—You are a true *attic* spirit, and will not refuse a kindness to a poor Hare who has not many friends in that dismal warren, eke your city of London. I throw myself into your hands because I do not want to be made the victim of that famous recipe, "first catch your hare, then skin it." If you lend me some money, you won't ask exorbitant interest. Can you "do" me a £50 note? That is the correct phrase in the vocabulary of every fine young man. You've no idea what a



place this Como is, *Dolce far niente* with a vengeance. Suits me to a T. I shall bring *somebody we know* for her honeymoon here. She writes to me regularly, little angel, saves her pocket-money to pay the postages; for Mrs. Merton has turned out a grubby old soul, and won't allow a queen's head for my sake, since I left your place. She wants her own style of bliss for her Edith, carriage, sables, big fires, turkeys and bread sauce. But Edith and I mean to have fairyland, and rule in it, and take the revenues thereof. Please to grant my humble petition. I can't give you any security till next month, when I shall strike twenty-one on the horologe of time, and shall not delay to send you a lease or a mortgage or something. Trust the honour of a Hare that never doubled. Let me tell you that I am learning to play the flute, and sometimes practise for three hours a day. But how long do you think that will last?" And then the letter closed with a few rather careless directions as to the transmission of the proposed loan.

It made me quite aghast! What had I done that this scatter-brained boy should think me such a fool as to part from my money so easily, or it might be, such a knave as to make traffic of his giddiness and folly? What impression could I have produced on

him? My firm, precise nature had not then peeped enough over its own neat fences to know that there are plenty of people in the world whose actions start forth they know not why, and care not wherefore, who, parodying a good energetic old proverb, "Strike the iron everywhere, to find the weak place." I wrote back a disgusted and rather didactic epistle, which I dare say served to light a cigarette on the banks of the "Iago," and then Percy Hare vanished from my horizon, as familiar waymarks will vanish, while we sail round this globe of our Life.

But Life is a globe nevertheless, and our mere going-on generally brings us again and again to the same things. For you and for me, friend, it does not matter that there are billions of fellow-creatures on this earth, and even millions in this one city of London. For you and for me, friend, there are very few people in the world, and the whole creation is such a narrow gangway, that we are as unable to keep out of the way of these as I am to help meeting my country neighbours in the one straggling street of Mallowe.

• It was fully ten years since I had closed correspondence with Percy Hare, when I chanced to go into some splendid Regent Street shop to buy a Christmas trifle for Ruth. I always made what old

ladies call "a great work" over my Christmas purchases. I was never in such fine shops on any other occasion, and never having another opportunity of seeing new fashions and inventions, the fashions and inventions of the whole year were new to me then and I always found the shopmen kindly and instructive. Perhaps, among their very knowing and exigent customers, my wondering and delighted ignorance was as refreshing to their souls as green is said to be to a colour-tired eye.

Well, I was standing in this splendid shop, studying the various mechanisms of three new sorts of work-cases, when my eyes fell on a lady sitting before a cross-counter, looking over some stationery. There was something familiar to me in her face—I had seen it before somewhere. Now, those stray memories that glint across the mind, like transient lights, are the only riddles which I have ever taken real trouble to solve. I don't think I could sleep with one such undiscovered. I have stood stock-still in the street to puzzle out my previous acquaintance with some face that has just passed me heedlessly enough in the throng, only to remember, in many cases, that it had merely been my *vis-à-vis* in omnibus or train. But even such commonplace solution as this has interest for me, and opens a new

problem. For why should I remember one face where I must have forgotten so many?

This lady at the counter was about thirty years of age, with a strange, painful girlishness of appearance, like a flower that has been checked in early spring. She had a quantity of very soft, fair hair, with gold in it like the dead gold of autumn leaves. Her face was small and pale, with fine blue veins distinctly traced under the skin. It was as sad a face as ever I have seen—all the more so that it was sad with no conscious sorrow, nor with a shade of repining. It was such a patient tired face—a watching face, too, though there was neither hope nor expectation left in it. Her dress was entirely black, though one deep crimson flower in her bonnet showed she was not in mourning.

My glance was far too unobtrusive to arrest her attention, yet, when her eyes happened to turn my way, they rested upon me with a keen, long look. But her voice—the ghost of a sweet bright voice—was quite strange to me. I doubt if I should have ever probed the mystery had I not overheard her, when her purchase was completed, direct that the packet should be sent to “Miss Edith Merton.”

Yes, it was she. I had seen her once or twice in the old times, when she and Percy had passed me

with a bow in the public gardens. We had never been introduced, and I could not presume to address her, strong as was my sudden wish to make inquiry after my old acquaintance. I could only observe that she was Edith Merton still, leaving to conjecture whether death, estrangement or faithlessness had come between her and her early lover.

I went home, and passed my Christmas, and after mentioning my encounter to some old crony who also remembered Percy, I naturally enough forgot it, till it was recalled to my mind about a month later, by my office-boy bringing me in a superfine and fashionable card engraved—.

“MR. PERCY HARE.”

The gentleman followed close at the lad's heels, as if he meant to come in and to be very welcome, and to feel so. Percy was now a tall, airy, elegant man of two or three and thirty, in wonderfully well-cut garments, and with a magnificent chain and seals. He talked so fluently and fast, that his conversation was like one long sentence without capital letters or stops. I could scarcely get in a word edgeways, and to this day remain in doubt whether Miss Merton had mentioned seeing me, and so had suggested his

visit, or whether it was merely one of those odd coincidences which will so perplexingly happen.

I think he shook my hand for five minutes. He called me "dear old Ned." I don't think he was insincere, for his was one of those light natures with whom feeling follows the semblance. He said what ought to be said, and meant it afterwards. I fancy his words came home to his own heart, like a match to fuel—the fuel may be only paper, but it burns brightly while it lasts.

I do not like to depose that I am correct in the places where he had travelled, but I think I can be quite sure that he mentioned Mexico, St. Louis, and Burmah. I laughingly suggested that he must have made his fortune in such auriferous neighbourhoods.

"No, he had not," he said; "he thought he ought to. But let anybody say what they might, fortunes were not easily made anywhere. He had enjoyed himself, though." Somehow he looked grave as he said that.

"And you have not married?" I said, interrogatively.

"No," he answered, with one sad glance in his quick, blue eyes. But he rallied. "There's plenty of time for that yet. Edith is a dear good angel,

and will wait. We've been engaged all these years, Garrett. Mrs. Merton died long ago, but she had full powers over her fortune, and only left Edith a small annuity tied down upon herself and her children, irrespective of any husband she might marry. It was done just to keep us apart, Garrett. She left a letter for her daughter, in which she said she had determined that her dear father's savings should not be wasted by a spendthrift in gadding about and tailors' bills. The other sister only married a poor ~~degenerate~~, but the mother chose to approve of him, and they have everything. But the fact is, I made a great fool of myself since I saw you, and have lost nearly all my money. I took it out of the funds, and invested it to bring in a capital interest; a first-rate affair, it promised to be, I assure you, Garrett. Enough to tempt any fellow. I thought I had secured an ordinary merchant's income, with no slavery or confinement attached to it. Ah, Garrett! where is that money now? Just where the snow is that fell a month ago! But I'm not down-hearted: I'm not worse off than most people yet. And I am a man of a thousand resources. I am just starting in a new groove, now, and as soon as ever I see my way to the smallest settled income, we shall marry, and live very, very quietly, of

course, quite in the dove-and-nest style. I should like to have done better for Edith, but she declares she will be perfectly happy, poor dear. In fact, Garrett (with a sudden animation), it is this new project that emboldened me to call upon you. I knew that you were so disgusted with me, and with such good reason, that I have always felt—"Well, much as I should like to meet Mr. Garrett again, I will never go in his way till I can justify myself as an industrious, responsible member of society. Now, you must know I am promoting a new association—a South American mine company. I am to be the secretary. You see, I know all about the mine. At least, I mean, I have been very near it. I don't know that the shafts were sunk then, but I know all about the locality. I am sanguine over the affair. I am to be remunerated both by salary and commission; and we have taken splendid offices in Regent Street, and my hours are only to be from eleven till four. In fact, it will be just enough business to make life enjoyable. Now, Mr. Garrett, why I ventured to call upon you is, to ask if you would allow me to put your highly respectable name down as a director. We want just one or two more than we have. And we really did not know who to ask: we wish to keep it so select. We don't want any of



your common company names—lord mayor this, and sheriff that. We don't want to be popular, you know, Mr. Garrett. a Popularity means scraping up small profits with immense labour. We wish to keep this a first-class affair. There will be no risk. You need only take one or two shares, which the board will be happy to allot to you."

And he was going on to explain how and under what conditions, when I stopped him, stating, that I had made a resolution, which I hoped to keep all my life, never to read my name to anything which I did not fully understand and approve, and whose rectitude and prosperity I could not undertake to guarantee, not only at the time of my joining it, but at any future time while my name should remain with it, and that, at that period, my own business required all the time, attention, and money at my command.

Percy heard me out with his ready, polite attention, and facile assent.

"There's a great deal of wisdom and prudence in that," he admitted. Percy was never in thorough earnest about anything, even folly. His mind was one of those stony places, where any seed, good or bad, springs up the more readily, because there is no soil wherein it can strike down. But he had

scarcely an idea, which had grown in its place too strong to be torn up by any passing hand so effectually, roots and all, that he could scarcely tell where it had been. He was always easily convinced, because conviction meant nothing to him.

He did not press his suit; did not even mention it again, when Giles, and one or two others of our house, who had known him of old, found their way into the counting-house, and joined in our conversation. He stayed about an hour longer, and at last left us with an airy assurance that he should presently invite us all to a supper at his private chambers—he had not hired them yet—he was just staying at a hotel, but he should engage them presently, as the world was turning round his way at last.

“He looks quite his age, doesn’t he?” said Giles, as he departed. “I thought he didn’t at first, he’s so supple and slender, and with such a frisky sweep in his hair. But though his face has not one line, it has a hundred fine wrinkles. How old should you guess him?” he enquired of our cashier, who had never seen Mr. Hare before.

“Not under forty-five,” said the cashier.

“And he’s ten years less,” Giles observed, turning to me; “his youthfulness resembles youth as

the greasy shine of an old hat mocks the glisten of a new beaver."

"Years will not 'pass without a trace," I said; "where they don't rub, they rust."

And I thought to myself that pleasure turns a harder mill than duty, though that is only a treadmill, and the other grinds corn. Duty is a born queen, and royally merciful: pleasure is a born slave, and slavishly tyrannical.

We never went to that promised supper-party; we were never invited. We saw the advertisement of the Juanita Silver Mine Company in the newspaper. I always intended to look in at its office. I had my own opinion about poor Percy. My charity could do no more for him than place him on that very indefinite line which divides schemer from swindler—that murky and dismal line towards which we are all in danger of drifting whenever we begin to think of what is easiest rather than of what is highest, and to hope for three-halfpence of wage for a pennyworth of work. I knew, too, that the kindness and cheerfulness which had fallen to his share in the curious allotment of qualities,—which, perhaps, after all, makes existence endurable, and which would have been such shining graces in some—were merely tarnished gems upon him. The cheap-

Jack's jewellery may be of the pattern that is sold in Bond Street, but, because it is in the cheap-jack's box, one knows it is only worthless gilt. But while it is one's duty to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," I cannot believe it is one's duty to leave to his fate the worthless, unconverted man of one's own age, education, and set. It may be urged, and not without great force, that there is danger in ungodly companionship where there is so much equality. Let all due precaution be taken. Let it be prayerfully borne in mind that there can be no "fellowship" between God and the world, and let it be ascertained with all diligent humility, that the Spirit of God is really an inmate of our own hearts, and then surely we can have a good word to "our brother whom we have seen," as well as a pound to send a missionary to preach to the Kaffirs whom we have not seen. No one expects an invalid or a cripple to save a drowning man; but what should we say of the strong man who stood aside and turned away his head whilst his fellow-creature sank? What shall we say of the strong Christian who will not put out his hand to save a sinking soul? Can he be a strong Christian to have so little love and faith? Verily, he is not akin to the athlete who declared, "I could wish

that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren."

Alas ! by my own words I stand condemned, for I never went to see poor Percy. Let me plead what excuses I can, just because I feel there is no real excuse. 'I did not know where to find him, except during his brief business hours, and they were precisely those when I was busiest myself. His locality was far out of my beaten tracks. Do not tell me that I might have written, or sent, or made an appointment in a thousand ways. Do not tell me,—for I know it too well without any telling.

But do you ask what gospel I could possibly have carried to poor Percy Hare in the course of a short call, or a luncheon, or a little walk. Well, such an one as this : he might have bought a dozen less of lemon-coloured kids when he saw me, regularly in stout black ones : he might have found a little faith in the comfort and happiness of work, when he saw me cheerful and gay under its burdens : he might have spent five shillings on some book that we talked about, instead of on a dress-circle ticket for the performance of a burlesque of Milton's "Comus," and a grand dramatic representation of Byron's "Corsair." Do not ask what substantial good such as this could have done him. God knows. He who marks out

the foundation is a fellow-worker with him who puts on the corner-stone. We remember the preacher or the author who opened our heart to celestial sunshine, but we forget the simple Christians who got us into the habit of going to God's house, or of reading "good books" on Sundays. But God remembers them, and the greatest human captains of His argosies also know the value of the nameless man at the wheel. And praised be God that His merciful providence ever and anon reveals the link between the humblest agent and the highest result. It keeps us happy. Let it also make us diligent and careful.

But I went to the Regent Street office to see Percy Hare at last. I found two discontented-looking men waiting in its very handsome lobby. They eyed me with some distrust at first, and after I had cheerfully remarked on the sunshine and pleasant breeze, one of them observed, with a shade of contempt, "That he supposed I had not been 'let in' for much?"

"Why, don't you know it's a smash?" he said, as I expressed my utter inability to know what he meant. "The Juanita is a regular do. I don't know whether there is a mine, or whether there ain't, but there'll never be as much coined out of it as we've put in it. I was up here last week, asking

questions and making a row—I've a right to do that, I think—it's a dear luxury to pay two hundred pounds for. I saw the swell-secretary then. He spoke very fair,—said he'd been done himself,—hadn't seen a shilling of his last quarter's salary. Very fair, he spoke. Shook hands with me, sir, and said we was brothers in misfortune. May have been true or may not. Generally, it's all birds of a feather that's in one nest—unless it's a cuckoo."

Presently a small boy came in with a saveloy and a penny loaf. He had the office key to let himself in, and he asked us "What we were waiting for?" The secretary wasn't there: hadn't been for two or three days. Nor none of the other gentlemen. Came himself still, because there was nobody to tell him not to do so. Also because he wanted his money,—three weeks owing at three shillings a week, but shouldn't waste no more time expectin' of it. Was beginning to ask in the shops for an errand-boy's place. Was sick o' stayin' here and bein' bullied by the people as had been cheated. Reckoned his late employers was a bad lot."

And thus Percy Hare once more vanished from my horizon.

• And this time, for a much longer period. Years came and went, and one by one brought me grey

hairs, and wealth, and a longing to sit me down and rest awhile, before I should be summoned to my Master's presence. Until, at last, my sister Ruth and I agreed to spend the remnant of our days in this our present home at Mallowe, within a short walk of the green God's-acre where our forefathers lie buried, and amid old names of people and places that have gone sweetly echoing through our lives since the days when we first mispronounced them on our mother's knee.

Now, our servant Phillis, who is a daughter of the lodge-keeper at Mallowe Hall, had not naturally the hospitable instinct. She always wanted to know who people are, and what they have come for, and she never inferred that any guest would stop to dine or take tea, but waited till she was told so. She is growing out of this somewhat, now: her suspicion is modifying into caution. Whenever I hear her parleying in the hall, I can now be quite sure that there is something really dubious in the looks of her interlocutor.

I was writing in the back parlour one morning, when she came in with a slight, aggrieved bounce, saying—

“Please, sir, there's a somebody that wants to speak to you. I told him you was always particular



engaged at this time in the morning, but he said he thought you wouldn't mind. He's nobody that's been here before, sir, and he ain't a friend, I don't believe. Somebody bothering about commission-coals, or maybe, just got a card o' buttons. Shall I ask him what it's about, sir?"

"Did he give his name?" I inquired.

"Yes,—at least some sort of play-acting name—Percy something. I told Alice to keep her eye on him from the kitchen-stair, because of the coats and umbrellas," Phillis added, in an aside of triumphant wisdom.

"Show him in," I said, though I quite confess that the name aroused no memory.

Phillis cast one significant glance on the books and knick-knacks scattered around me, and obeyed.

There came in a tall, withered man, folded up tightly in a long frock-coat. He held out his blue, bony hands, and he wore a forlorn smile on his blue, bony face, but I could only look blankly at him.

"You don't know me," he said: "nobody does. I don't expect it. You'd never guess I was Percy Hare.

I made him sit down in the great arm-chair. I stirred the fire, that was still so welcome in the bright, cold spring weather. And I bade the

astonished Phillis to fetch a bowl of her richest soup, and a plate of her crispest rusks. I did it in the joy of my heart at the sight of an old face, through all of whose changes and strangeness, the familiar lines rose gradually as I gazed upon it. O young people, when you see your grandfather or your grandmother so delighted to welcome that drivelling spendthrift, or this tattling old alms-woman, do not cast slighting reflections on their youthful taste in acquaintances. You, too, may live to feel what it is to long for somebody who mingled, ever so little, in your Past, who knew the faces that you loved, and remembers the ways of life of which those around you know nothing. Think what a slight tie will link fellow-countrymen in a far country. And the aged live in a land of strangers.

"It's very kind of you to be so pleased to see me," said Percy, looking up wistfully with his poor dazed worn-out eyes. "I stood still in the road for ten minutes, thinking whether I should trouble you. Anyhow, it was a pleasure to find you settled in such a pretty snug place. It's well to know that the world is a cheery place for somebody. It isn't so to me, nowadays, Mr. Garrett."

"What have you been doing with yourself all these years, since I saw you?" I asked, as gently as

ever I could. Had he been twenty years younger it might have been truest charity to be harsh; but when the doors of earthly hope have closed upon a man, it is no use to slay them. "I asked after you once at Regent Street," I added, "but you had just left."

"I went abroad again after that," he said. "The gold fever had just broke out, and I went to the diggings. But I never found a nugget. I don't think there are more nuggets to be found there than anywhere else. Then I was editor of a weekly journal, but it only lived three months. Then I went north. I don't know what I did next. I have kept diaries, but they were among some diaries that I once—left behind me. I acted for a time. I did anything. I gave readings in the Far West. That was a rather better time. It didn't bring in much, but the settlers were kind, and would ask me to tea of an evening, and their dear daughters would give us a little music, and I would stay for family prayer. I've often wished myself really in that sort of life, Garrett. But I had to wander on for my bread, and at last I came back to England and I've collected for charities on commission, and I've got up Parliamentary petitions, and so forth."

"Well, you have had plenty of change and free-

dom," I said, not knowing what else to say, and remembering his early tastes in that direction.

Percy Hare shook his frisky, withered head. "I don't see it in that light, now," he answered. "When I was young I thought it was very fine to have all my time at my own disposal; I've been a poor, wandering, unsettled fellow all the days of my life, and that's the truth of it, Mr. Garrett. I always meant to settle before I grew old. But one never knows when one is growing old. One never notices autumn coming till all of a sudden, lo and behold! there are candles at tea-time and no more evening walks, and then it's too late to sow seed when other people are cutting their corn."

Just then Ruth came in, and had to be introduced, and that broke off the thread of personal confidence, and turned the conversation into a brisker tide of inquiry and explanation: while Ruth sat rather behind Mr. Hare, took out her knitting, and worked very fast, at some plain pattern which did not hinder frequent and significant glances at our visitor.

"I think I saw your partner, Giles, once in London, about a year ago," said Mr. Hare. "He was in a brougham, with a lady—greyish hair, has he? Am I likely to have been right?"

"Very likely," I answered, "for he keeps a brougham, and drives out almost every afternoon with his wife. And he has grey hair. You know Giles is quite as old as I am. Why, his eldest son was Senior Wrangler at Oxford fifteen years ago, and is a Queen's Counsel now!"

"Soh, soh," ejaculated Percy Hare. "That's the way the world wags. Why, Giles entered Lambert and Co.'s at fifteen shillings a week, didn't he?"

"He did," I said, quite proudly, "and lived on it, too."

"Of course, he was pretty well off, by the time I first knew him," Percy observed, "but he used to be dreadfully mean even then; I remember I once tried to get up an oyster supper for the first of August, but he threw cold water on it, and said he'd got a better use for his money, and he thought we might all have the same. Dreadfully mean!"

"But it is not often mean to grudge ourselves," said Ruth. "Meanness is rather to grudge everybody but ourselves; to take everything and give nothing; to keep ourselves always on the debtor's side and everybody else on the creditor's."

Percy turned to her differentially. "Well, I suppose it is so," he answered. "I don't suppose anybody can deny that if it is stated fairly. At any

rate, he drives in his own brougham now, and I walk to save the 'bus. I dare say there's something in ourselves that explain it all. But yet there's some luck in the matter."

"Well, there is such a thing as 'luck,' Mr. Hare," said Ruth, who, knowing nothing of our visitor, spoke her plain truths in happy unconsciousness. "It's a fancy name for being always at your duty, and in your place, and thus ready when the good time comes there."

"There's a great deal in that," Percy assented, with his old facility; "and what's become of David Wills, Mr. Garrett?"

"Dead, long, long ago," I replied. "He would have been made partner before me; but God had higher things ready for him, and so 'he was not, for God took him.' That was a good man, Hare."

"A saint," Percy responded; "and what a sweet woman his wife was. I remember how often she used to come to meet him of an evening, walking up smiling, and he was always so pleasantly 'surprised,' and yet they'd been married ever so long then. Is she still living, Mr. Garrett?"

"Not now," I said, "but she long survived him. She was left with four children, none grown up.

But she did capitally. She let almost all the house, and she and her girls turned an attic into a work-room, and never stopped doing something from six o'clock on Monday morning till twelve on Saturday night. Our firm kept its eye on them, and took in the boy as soon as he was old enough. But that was all we ever did for them, and Mrs. Wills's sister—a Mrs. Cromer—you may remember hearing of her, Hare—often told me she herself could never do more. 'Nobody ever got a chance of helping Kate,' Mrs. Cromer says; but the children all turned out well, and were 'doing for themselves' before the mother died. 'Praised be God,' Mrs. Wills said, when I went to see her on her death-bed. 'I've prayed regularly that he would spare me till the youngest could earn her thirty pounds a-year, and He has let me stay till she makes fifty!'"

"Dear me, she was such a merry little grig," said Percy Hare. "One would have thought her just made for petting and playfulness."

"She was the same to the last," I said. "Nothing ever came wrong to her. Everything that happened was a blessing. Her children were always calling after her, 'because mamma was such fun!' Only after her husband's death she grew to look as if she knew a happy secret that she would like to

impart to everybody, only that each must find it out for himself!"

"Well, well, well," Percy Hare sighed reflectively, like a man looking at the solution of a problem which he could never make out in the days when it would have been of use to him. And then he began to talk about going. We pressed him to await dinner and remain for the rest of the day. He looked at us dubiously, as if he felt the invitation to be tempting; but still shook his head, and said "that he must go. He must catch the London train that left Hopleigh in an hour's time." Poor Percy had learned to say "must" to himself at last. What hard drilling had been required to get that lesson into his life!

I could not part so easily with mine old acquaintance. I must have a few more private words with him. I could not let him go without some personal inquiries which I could not feelingly put even before my sister. What had become of Edith Merton? Had she ever married Percy, and was she dead? for he looked like a lonely man, with his buttoned-up coat and ragged Berlin gloves. So I proposed to walk with him to the station.

We set out in the pale spring sunshine. The young green leaves were already bright on the trees,



and the pear and almond blossoms were out. Percy did not seem able to walk very fast, it would take us all our time to reach his destination.

"And so you live in London?" I inferred, to open the conversation.

"Generally I do," he answered; "it depends on circumstances; but living in London is really the cheapest, I think. I've no real home, you see, Mr. Garrett, and it don't waste much time to pack up all my luggage."

"Is Miss Merton still living?" I asked, as the best form for a question that was not easily framed.

"No," he said, with one quick uplifting of his faded eyes. "She has been dead twenty years. She died—Miss Merton. She went in a kind of decline—general nervous depression, the doctors called it—came on gradually, and no medicine or advice could cure it, they said. They used to tell her to make an effort to shake off her depression. I used to think her very cheerful, but they said she wasn't really, and somehow she did not look so. She was very kind to me to the last, and she was the only person who has ever put me in a will, and she put me in for everything—all the little savings she had made, and the current payment of her annuity, and her gold watch and all. And she'd made me a little

watch-chain of her own hair, poor thing! The money went little by little, and I had to pawn the watch at last, and could never redeem it. But I've kept the chain; and I do believe it helps my credit a little yet, for people think there must be something fastened to it, but there isn't!"

He held it up, as he spoke, and smiled forlornly. Poor little chain of the dead-golden hair, with streaks of silver thick in it. It seemed fitting type of the sad, wasted love and life of which it was the sole relic.

"Are you very badly off, just now, Hare?" I ventured to inquire.

"Not particularly," he said, rather restively. "I'm selling pens on commission. Sometimes I do fairly. Still, it's very uncertain. But I may get something better. As I used to say, one doesn't know what a day may bring forth. I've said that too much in my day, Garrett. It's a fine motto to be used in despondency, but I used it when I was not at all desponding. I've been always wandering about, like a man who won't plant his own corn, but goes looking for some rich land where it grows wild. Ah, Garrett, if I had life over again—I don't mean with the fine chances of my youth—but just bare life, I'd take the hardest, lowest, and worst paid

work that came to hand, resting assured that it would never bring me to such slavery and degradation and need as I have lighted on in my search for ease and gentility and pleasure!"

"You must have had an eventful life," I said. "Your many adventures would be well worth hearing."

Percy Hare shook his head. "A life that hasn't been worth living, can't be worth telling," he said. "A coin doesn't grow in value by passing from hand to hand, and getting worn and clipped. Going about, and undergoing all sorts of experiences, won't make a man wise if he was a fool to begin with. I'm just a failure, Garrett. I've lived to please myself, and that's a mark which nobody hits who tries for it. The fact is I'm a nothing, Garrett. I'm just like a useless coat-skin of humanity. If there was more of me, I shouldn't be talking of myself like this. My very remorse is easy, sir; but there's awfulest bitterness in its very easiness. It seems as if I had killed my own heart."

Presently he resumed.

"Sometimes people say to me, 'You've been everybody's enemy but your own, Mr. Hare.' But that's altogether wrong. I've been the enemy of the woman I ought to have married and cherished and

made happy. I've been like a weed on the edge of a precipice, only likely to tempt the unwary to their destruction. Nobody's enemy but his own is nobody's friend, too, Mr. Garrett, and that is a poor title for any man to write after his name. Once upon a time, I myself used to fancy I was a good-natured fellow, whose sympathies, at least, were always on the right side. But now I see I have been a selfish, idle, good-for-nothing brute."

"Well," said I, "our dear Lord came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance, and it is the souls that are stained with the scarlet of conscious sin that He promises to wash in his own blood till they become white as snow."

"Ah, what a book the Bible is!" he responded. "Those who won't believe in it can't find anything else to put in its place. All my life, I never could help peeping into the Bible sometimes, though it would make me uncomfortable for days after. I was never a downright sceptic: I've always believed—maybe as the devils do—and trembled."

"Mr. Hare," I said solemnly, as we paused to part outside the station, "never forget who described His mission as the seeking and the saving of that which is lost. Never forget that it was a son, who had wasted his substance, and fallen to feed

with swine, who found his father watching for him, and waiting to welcome him at the gate. You can redeem your past life, old friend, but your Saviour is waiting to redeem you. And now can I be of any service to you? Won't you let me help you a little for the sake of old times?"

He looked at me, wistful and abashed. "It's no use trying to help me," he said; "it would be waste. I'm safest when I'm badly off, and I do want to be as good as I can for the rest of my little time. Keep your favours for somebody who will put them out with interest in the next generation, instead of tucking them up in a shroud and taking them into the grave—as I do."

It was the first gleam of self-denial which I had ever seen in Percy Hare,—and my heart warmed towards him.

"You sell pens," I said; "will it be worth your while to send me twenty boxes of your very best?"

"Twenty boxes!" he exclaimed. "Nonsense, Mr Garrett, you are only doing this out of kindness to me."

"I use a great many," I said gravely.

He looked at me hard. "I know so little of downright work," he observed, "that I can't be sure whether it's a purchase within reason or outside

I know it's larger than I generally get. But then you always were industrious. I shouldn't like to take a favour from you, Garrett, as if I'd only come to see you to get one. But when one hasn't ten shillings in the world, what is one to do? I see one must be frugal and industrious, if one is to keep even one's own feelings, though they don't eat or wear out shoes! You shall have the pens tomorrow, Garrett."

And we said good-bye. Next day the packet came. Ruth and I have written with Percy's pens ever since, and I think after all we may get 'brough them before we die.

I never saw my old comrade again. Nor heard from him, nor of him till I read in the *Daily News* :

"An inquest was held yesterday on the body of one Percy Hare, an elderly man who died suddenly at the Loadstone Coffeehouse, Minories, on Saturday last. The landlady deposed that deceased had lived there 'on and off' for sometime. He had a bedroom, and used to sit in the coffee room, but didn't 'board' with the house. Scldom required any ing done. Didn't think he had any means but what he earned by the sale of small articles. She gave him a cup of tea sometimes in bad weather, but she herself was a widow with five small children.

Thought deceased had known better days. He was always cheerful and would sing songs sometimes to the children. He had seemed ailing for a-while but he had not said anything, neither had she, been particularly busy. He was a well-conducted man, and had lately gone to church regular of Sundays. After hearing some medical evidence, the jury returned a verdict of death from natural causes, accelerated by privation and neglect."

It was in a week-old paper which I chanced to take up that I saw this. Percy Hare must have been buried in a pauper's nameless grave before I knew he was dead.

And I sighed for him, and his sad going-away, with an old man's slow, sore regret; but I felt it was only the stern filling up of the truth—that in heart and soul, in life and death, as well as in mere worldly wealth "He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man, he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich, and the end of that mirth is heaviness."

THE END.







